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ACOUSTIC

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DAVID RAWLINGS
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JACK JOHNSON

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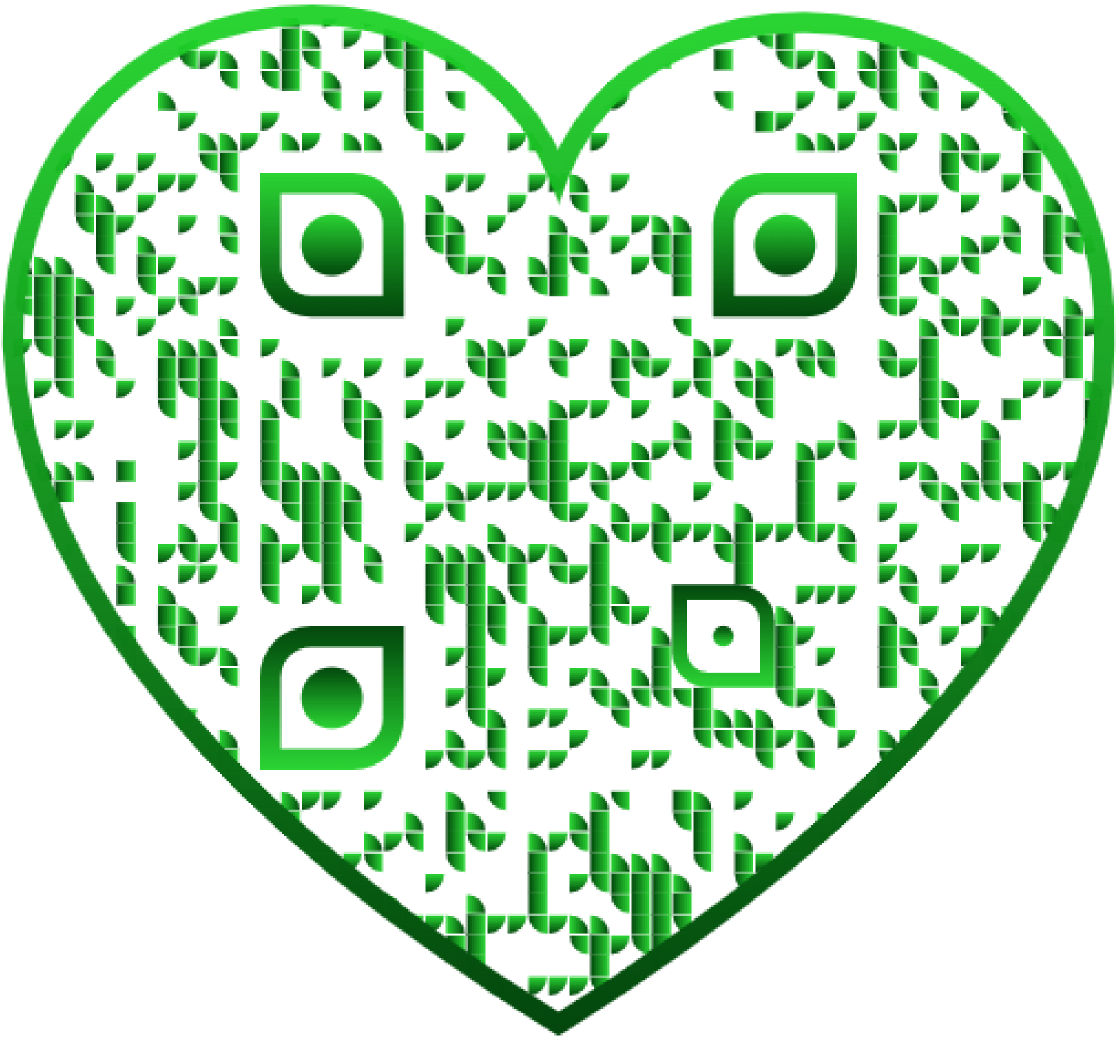

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THE ROOT NOTE

The clocks are about change; chiming in the short days and dark nights of winter. As such, we've decided to shine some Hawaiian sunshine into this issue.

With his first new album in four years, Jack Johnson is back in fine form. Despite selling 14 million records worldwide, the superstar still enthuses about learning new guitar techniques – and he's not shy to share a few player tips either. As relaxed in person as his music would suggest, we welcome the stress-free island-life attitude with open arms.

Acoustic was also lucky enough to attend an ultra-exclusive gig with Yusuf/Cat Stevens at his childhood home to celebrate new album, *The Laughing Apple*. Marking 50 years since the release of his first two albums, this really is musical history in the making. Honoured.

Elsewhere, former Bellowhead frontman Jon Boden talks new album, open tunings and his love of after-show gigs. Brothers in arms Willie Watson and David Rawlings give us the lowdown on their new albums and it's business as usual for George Thorogood, despite venturing into unchartered acoustic territory, plus lots more great interviews.

Gear-wise, we've been bowled over by Larrivée's attempt to capitalise on the highly-competitive, affordable, small-bodied guitar market. We test Taylor's claim that their new Grand Concert 12-string is a revelation to players who usually avoid doubling up. We howl at the moon with the latest addition to Faith's Blood Moon series and crack the allen key out to test an innovative travel guitar that fits in your hand luggage.

We've got some great tuition too. Within these pages you can learn some Sonny Landreth slide guitar licks, an absolute staple classical guitar piece, pick up some stirring harmonic tips, become a bluegrass banjo boss and learn culture-defying ukulele from a Grammy award-winning master.

Readers can also win one of two Freshman ukuleles, which both earned four stars when they were reviewed this month.

So, if that measly extra hour in bed isn't sufficient compensation for the short, gloomy days the next five months have in store, hopefully, the magazine will be. Enjoy!

Dan Hobson
Editor

www.acousticmagazine.com
Issue 137 November 2017

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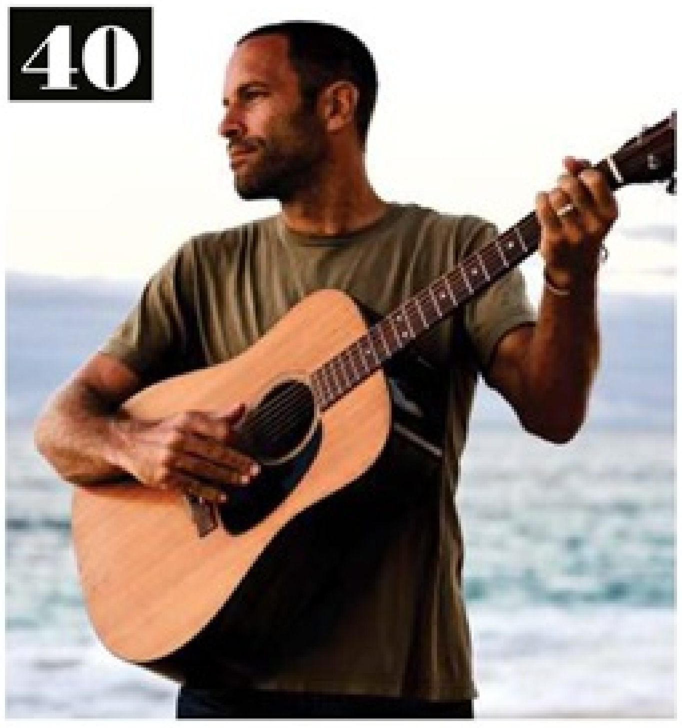

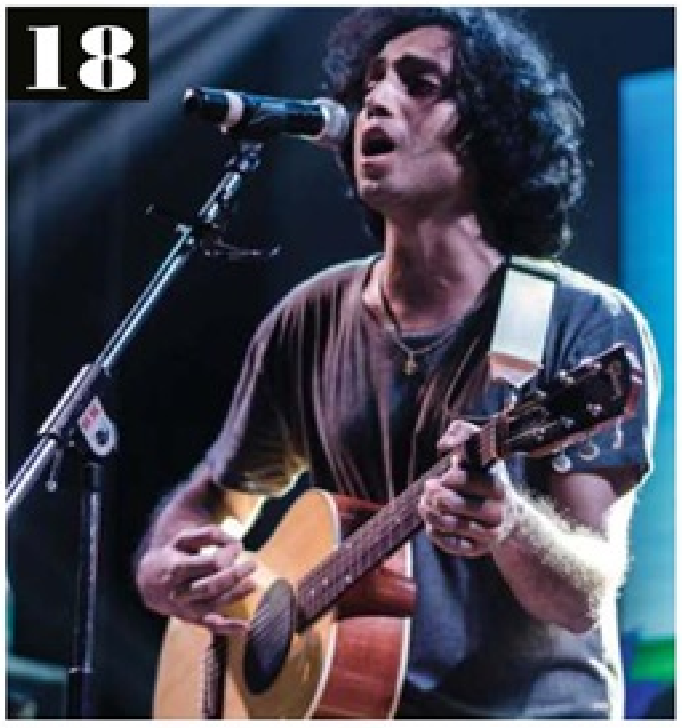

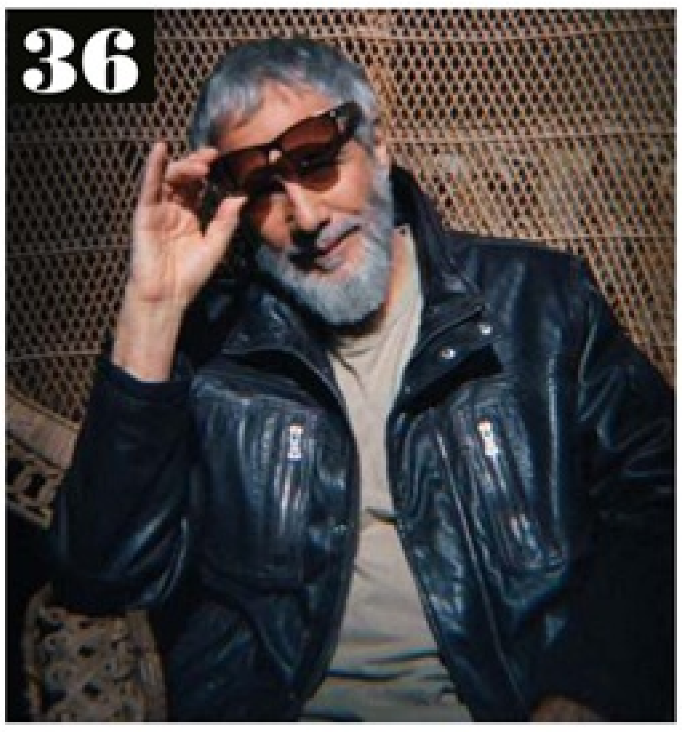

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ACOUSTIC NEWS DESK

FOR THE LATEST NEWS VISIT **WWW.ACOUSTICMAGAZINE.COM**

AMP-MAKERS GO ACOUSTIC

Genzler Amplification will produce their first acoustic instrument amplifier, the Acoustic Array PRO.

The AA-PRO offers a full preamp design with two identical channels, both with mic and instrument inputs, along with a 150W/300W class D power amplifier. Of most interest, the makers say, will be a sophisticated speaker system design. Based upon their bass guitar cabinets, the AA-PRO speaker system features a 10" woofer in a ported chamber along with the pattern control of a proprietary line array column, mounted forward of the woofer in the centre of the speaker baffle. With no tweeter, the mid and high frequencies produced by the line array suit the acoustic instrument to a tee. **Watch this space for news of UK availability, however it will retail at $999.99 in the US in November. For more info, see www.genzleramplification.com.**

Meanwhile, Hughes & Kettner have entered the acoustic world with a premium 250W acoustic amplifier.

Designed and engineered with Michael Eisenmann and built at the firm's headquarters in Germany, the makers say that Era 1 is the 'truest' that an amp of this type has ever been to the acoustic's original tone. Eisenmann, the brains behind some of the greatest acoustic amps of all time, said: "Designing an acoustic amp with a rock'n'roll company was an exciting challenge, and Era 1 is the result of great teamwork. Era 1 is an extremely versatile tool for amplifying acoustic instruments, even for complicated ones like the violin, and it takes the whole concept of being small, loud, easy to use and very dynamic to a whole new level." **Era 1 is available now in a wood (ERA1WD) or (ERA1BK) black finish priced at £1189 UK RRP. Info: www.hughes-and-kettner.com**

FENDER RELEASES NEW UKES

Fender has expanded its ukulele offering with five new instruments, including the Venice, Seaside, Zuma, Rincon and Montecito ukes, collectively dubbed the California Coast Series.

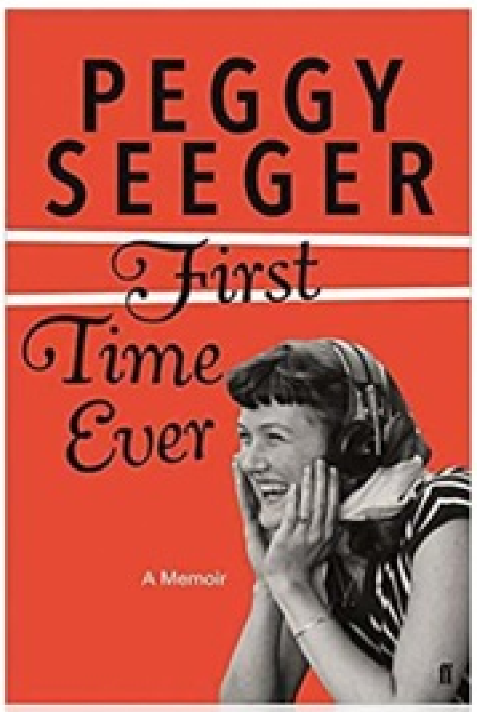
The Venice (£50) is the entry-level model, featuring a four-in-line Telecaster-style headstock and a slim, C-shaped neck. Elsewhere, the Rincon (£170) is built in ovangkol and comes with a Fishman Kula preamp, while the Montecito tenor tops the range at £210, with a full koa body, solid-top construction and green abalone binding. **Info: www.fender.com**

NO PLASTIC ON THE JOHNSON TOUR

Hawaiian singer-songwriter Jack Johnson, our cover star this issue (see page 40), has ditched the plastic on tour.

Eco-minded Johnson who is also known as a big fan of sustainable luthiers Cole Clark, joined the campaign to reduce single-use plastics on tour to promote #plasticfreejuly – although the guitarist has championed the cause over the course of his career.

Now thanks to fans and crew using reusable water bottles and cups at the shows, they have already diverted more than 35,000 single-use plastic bottles from landfills and distributed more than 44,000 reusable pint cups at the shows. **Info: www.allatonce.org**



PEGGY SEEGER AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Peggy Seeger, one of folk's most influential artists, has released her autobiography.

In the 464-page memoir, Seeger writes of a rollercoaster life in a beautifully-realised account. In her newsletter, she told fans: "It's been a long haul, taking me back through fields of daisies, mountain hikes, swamps, quick sands, weather of all sorts over 82 years. I started out by writing for Irene, my second life partner – then found out I was writing it for family, friends, workmates, myself and for you." **Info: www.peggyseeger.com**

BOOTLEG BOB DYLAN OUT THIS MONTH

A bumper Bob Dylan bootleg collection is to be released this month, including more than 100 unreleased songs.

Bob Dylan – Trouble No More – The Bootleg Series Vol. 13 / 1979-1981 is to be released by Columbia Records/Legacy Recordings on November 3. The deluxe nine disc box set – comprising eight CDs and one DVD – is the latest volume in Dylan's bootleg series; showcasing a pivotal period in his legendary career.

The bumper package includes 100 previously unreleased live and studio recordings, including 14 unheard songs, as well as an exclusive DVD of *Trouble No More: A Musical Film*, a new feature-length film incorporating never-before-seen footage from Dylan's 1980 tours.

The latest chapter in the series showcases the music Dylan wrote and performed during one of the most surprising, controversial and inspired periods of his career. As the 1980s began, Dylan responded to the changing of the decades with a three album trilogy – *Slow Train Coming* (1979), *Saved* (1980) and *Shot of Love* (1981) – of spirit-filled songs of praise, worship and devotion. These songs were as deeply personal and packed with poetics as any Dylan had ever written, but the force of conviction and power of faith evident in these performances baffled segments of Dylan's fanbase, just as Dylan's 'going electric' had alienated folk purists in 1965.

Info: www.bobdylan.com

FIRST COUNTRY 2 COUNTRY HEADLINERS ANNOUNCED

Country 2 Country Festival – the yearly event uniting country artists from either side of the Atlantic – have announced the first headliners for 2018.

Grammy award-winning superstars Faith Hill (pictured) and Tim McGraw will be bringing their highly acclaimed Soul2Soul tour to next year's event, which is set to take place simultaneously at London's O2 Arena, Glasgow's SSE Hydro and Dublin 3arena across March 9, 10, 11.

Faith Hill and Tim McGraw will be joined by a whole host of multi-platinum and acclaimed artists across the weekend.

Info: www.c2c-countrytocountry.com

COUNTRY STAR SPEAKS AFTER LAS VEGAS SHOOTING

Jason Aldean, the country musician whose performance was cut short by the shooting in Las Vegas on October 3, has spoken of his trauma after the events unfolded – commenting that he's now "afraid to bring his children up in this world".

On Instagram, he posted: "Over the last 24 hrs I have gone through lots of emotions. Scared, anger, heartache, compassion and many others. Something has changed in this country and in this world lately that is scary to see. This world is becoming the kind of place I am afraid to raise my children in."

He called for unity in response to the tragedy, but said the U.S. has a "long way to go" before it recovers. "My heart aches for the victims and their families of this senseless act," he continued. "I am so sorry for the hurt and pain everyone is feeling right now and there are no words I can say to take that pain away. Just know you all are in my heart and my prayers as we all go through this together."

Aldean was onstage when gunman Stephen Paddock opened fire from the Mandalay Bay Hotel onto crowds of people at the Route 91 Harvest festival. He posted on Instagram hours after the shooting to let fans know he was safe, and sent prayers to those affected. He ended both posts with the hashtag #stopthehate.

RIP TOM PETTY

Tributes have been paid to Tom Petty, who has died aged 66.

He was found unconscious at his Malibu Home, having suffered a cardiac arrest. The singer and guitarist was taken to UCLA Santa Monica but was declared dead at the hospital.

Long-time manager Tony Dimitriades confirmed the death in a brief statement on behalf of his family. "He died peacefully at 20:40 Pacific time (03:40 GMT Tuesday 3 October)," the statement read, "surrounded by family, his bandmates and friends."

Born in Gainesville Florida on October 20, 1950, Petty rose to fame with the Heartbreakers after a breakthrough UK tour in 1976. By the end of the 80s he was a well-established member of the US rock elite, and the Heartbreakers were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2002. Hits such as 'I Won't Back Down', 'Free Fallin'' and 'Runnin' Down a Dream' remain radio mainstays.

As well as releasing three solo albums and forming 80s supergroup The Traveling Wilburys alongside Bob Dylan, George Harrison and Jeff Lynne, Petty released 13 LPs with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. Last summer's tour marked the band's 40th anniversary.

Bob Dylan spoke to the *LA Times*. "It's shocking, crushing news," he said. "I thought the world of Tom. He was a great performer, full of the light, a friend, and I'll never forget him."

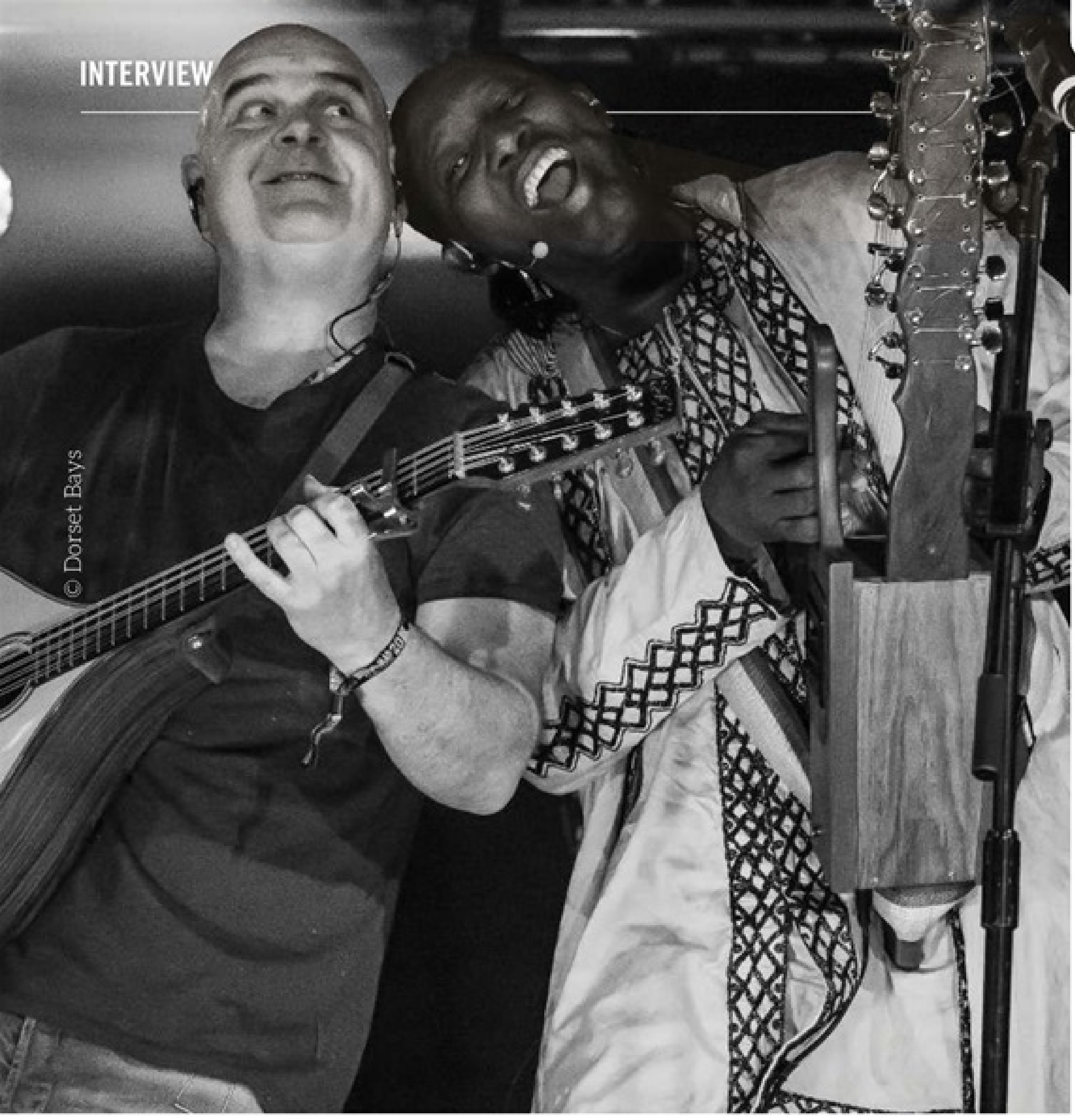
RIP TOM PALEY

American folk singer Tom Paley has died at 89 years of age.

The guitar and banjo virtuoso, whose work with the New Lost City Ramblers helped kickstart the folk music revival of the 1950s and 1960s, had lived in the UK since the 60s.

A Yale University-educated mathematician, he fell in with folk scenesters such as Woody Guthrie and Mike Seeger in the 50s – and never looked back.

He was also, according to the *Washington Post*, believed to have been the last living person to have performed with blues pioneer Lead Belly, who died in 1949. Tom released his final album with son Ben in 2015, entitled *Paley & Son*.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GEARBOX

We asked Simon and N'Faly for a quick insight into Afro Celt's stringed section

Fylde

SE: For acoustic guitar I'm very proud of this Fylde, which Roger from Fylde gave to me. It's a great big jumbo and you can play all the bottom end and all the funky, dubby basslines on it.

Cittern

SE: My main instrument is the cittern. I started in the band with very little interest in acoustic music, but then I found a cittern in Hobgoblin. I started playing that and I loved it: tuned in fifths and you could really drone over it. I didn't want to play DADGAD because it had become a bit of a meat and two veg way of playing.

Kora

SE: To be honest, everything we do is based around the kora.

NK: In Mali we played it just for the King. But Afro Celt's use of kora, because of the mix of electronic, African and Irish influences, requires whole new tunings. With Afro Celt I have no choice – I have to be modern. We now even have a chromatic kora.

AFRO CELT SOUND SYSTEM

They may be as experimental as they get, but Afro Celt Sound System are ready to go back to their acoustic roots, says founder Simon Emmerson

Afro Celt Sound System have always played with the definitions of acoustic, roots-based music. However, despite straying into the world of electronica over the past 20 years, 2017 finds the band back in full acoustic flow again. "I think we'll be playing more acoustically from now on," producer-guitarist Simon Emmerson declares to *Acoustic*, fresh from a pulse-racing, more-or-less acoustic set at this year's WOMAD festival. "Because the whole sensibility of the band has evolved into that groove, we'll sit with it. That's how we work."

Sitting down for a post-show chat, *Acoustic* caught a brief glimpse into what makes their globe-spanning, genre-busting live setup tick.

What kick-started it all for you?

My own inspiration came from an African musician called Manu Dibango who had a massive hit in the 1970s, 'Soul Makossa'. He said to me he wanted to take technology back to Africa and integrate it with traditional instruments. Then I went to Senegal in 1991 and joined up with [songwriter-guitarist] Baaba Maal's band, who were all traditional musicians, all griots [West African community elders and poets] and found that they were actually all conversant in different forms of technology – they just didn't have access to it.

How has 'world music' changed?

Dramatically. It was a horrible term really: not one I signed up to. When we started there was an orthodoxy. This sense that the Europeans had to protect the Africans from themselves and stop them engaging in the music of the 21st century. N'Faly Kouyate (Afro Celt's kora player) came along and said "Nope, I want to play with drum machines and techno beats." Now it's much more of a creative playground.

Lots of bands are now using African guitar riffs. Acts like Caribou. There's been a return to roots music, Americana stuff. There's a third generation in Ireland who I'm really excited by. The new 'trad' players are fully conversant in music from around the world. That wasn't the case 20 years ago.

How would you define the music you play at the moment?

I'd say it's Afro Celt music. Definitely post-world music; post trad. We were all rooted in trad music. It's trad music for the 21st century really. ■

Afro Celt Sound System will be touring the UK this autumn.

Info: www.afroceltsoundsystem.org.uk

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SEE PAGE 66 FOR OUR FULL REVIEW

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ASK THE EXPERTS

MUSIC HAS BEEN REVOLUTIONISED BY STREAMING, BUT WHAT NEXT FOR THE ARTISTS LEFT OUT OF POCKET AS A RESULT?

The Musicians' Union is lobbying at European Union and UK levels for fair remuneration for performers from streaming.

Streaming sites like YouTube currently fall under 'safe harbor' legislation which effectively means they are not held responsible for user generated or uploaded content they host. This means labels and publishers struggle to achieve reasonable licence fees for use of music and MU members don't receive fair payment as a result. This lack of income from streaming is known as the 'value gap'.

Record labels and music publishers have been very proactive in campaigning for legislation to change and pressure to be applied to services like YouTube, which is owned by Google, to pay fairly. In support of this, the MU has been lobbying in conjunction with the labels and publishers via UK Music, the umbrella body for the British music industry.

However, just addressing the value gap would not resolve the complex issues associated with streaming royalties. The MU has also been closely involved in the Fair Internet for Performers campaign (www.fair-internet.eu) through its association with the International Federation of Musicians (FIM), which is picking up momentum as a result of various potential legislative developments at EU level. "Non-featured musicians such as session and orchestral musicians currently receive no royalties for streaming whatsoever," explains Naomi Pohl, MU assistant general secretary.

"Radio broadcast generates royalties for non-featured performers, administered by the collecting society PPL, and yet curated playlists offered on streaming sites, which are very much like radio, generate nothing.

"Given the gradual decline in radio listening figures – Radio 1 lost a million listeners last year – and the rapid take-up of streaming services both subscription and free, we want to see a new revenue stream from streaming for those musicians which mirrors radio play payments.

"We hope the EU copyright directive being discussed at present will go some way to addressing problems with the streaming business model. However, the UK government will still need to look in detail at how money generated by streaming services filters through to featured artists, songwriters, performers and producers we represent."

The MU believes business models and contractual arrangements need to change.

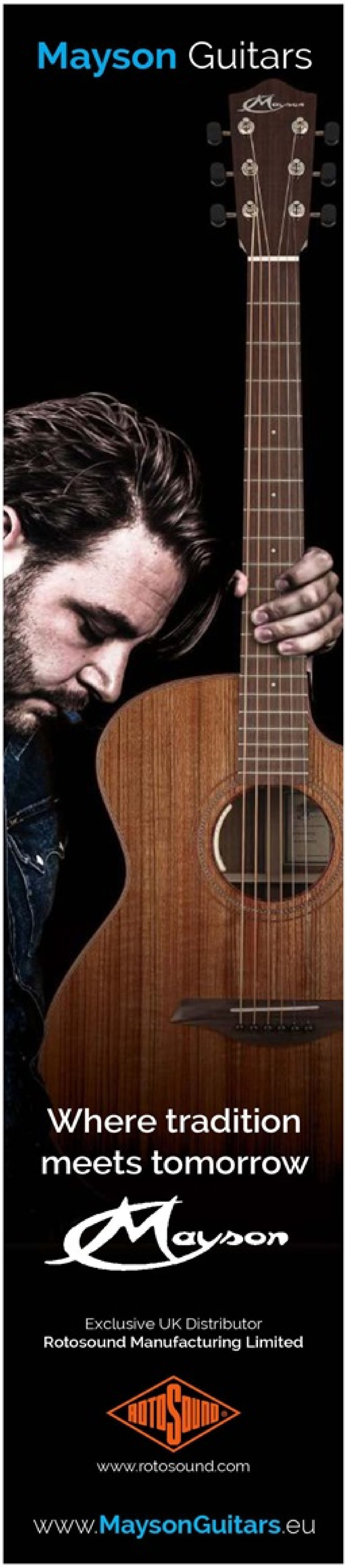
"Featured artists are often paid the same percentage royalty on streaming that they got on CDs, for example, and the same deductions may apply. This is as a result of contracts being drawn up prior to the advent of digital and not reflecting the way streaming services operate. Delivery of a stream is far cheaper than producing a physical CD, for example, and therefore the percentage royalty to the artist should be greater in my opinion," adds Pohl.

The MU is also lobbying for greater transparency for performers and creators regarding royalties: what they are paid and why. While many labels and publishers are improving in terms of the information they issue along with payments, there is still a veil of secrecy around certain licence fees. Non-disclosure agreements may prevent the MU or individual musicians from gaining access to detailed accounting. This makes it extremely difficult for musicians to analyse the fairness of individual income streams and assess their share in relation to a global figure.

The Association of Independent Music (AIM), which represents independent UK record labels, has already committed to treating artists fairly in agreements relating to digital exploitation of their work, including issuing more transparent royalty statements. However attempts to get major labels and publishers to sign a similar pledge stalled earlier this year.

"We want a fair share for our members; a fair share of a licence fee that's fair," says Pohl. ■

Find out more about the value gap, and other issues the MU is campaign on, via theMU.org



JON BODEN

Jon Boden's trophy cabinet is getting a tad heavy with all those BBC Folk Awards; with a new album, the former Bellowhead frontman may need to visit the furniture store...

WORDS: DAN HOBSON

He's certainly kept us waiting, but Jon Boden is back with new solo album *Afterglow*. The record follows 2009's *Songs From The Floodplain*, which explored the idea of how society might survive in a post peak-oil world.

Featuring former Bellowhead members amongst his Remnant Kings band, it will be the second in a trilogy of albums based around the narrative.

Whilst *Songs From The Floodplain* told the story of a rural post peak-oil community, *Afterglow* is set in an urban street festival – a scene of decaying buildings, burning oil drums and homemade fireworks – in which two lovers are trying to find one another.

The inspiration for the album came in part to Boden's involvement with the *Dark Mountain Project*; a collective of creatives who produce contemporary art and literature which reflects the current upheaval in ecological, economic and sociopolitical issues.

However, it is the 'post' part of 'post-apocalyptic' writing that has informed Boden's explorations; focussing on the positives of what things we might regain that have been lost in the melée of 21st century modernity – not just the negatives.

Featuring the playing of former Bellowhead members Sam Sweeney (drums) and Paul Sartin (oboe and fiddle), alongside the bass playing of Ben Nicholls (Seth Lakeman, Martin Carthy, Cara Dillon), *Afterglow* fuses traditional and modern sounds fantastically.

Acoustic caught up with Boden weeks before the album's October release.

So, tell us about the new record...

Its subject matter is more urban and that is reflected in sound. There's still a lot of acoustic guitar, but this has more electric guitar, strings, and brass, which I didn't have so much of on the last album. Sonically, it's quite Bellowhead, but it doesn't sound like Bellowhead because it's all my own songs and the way it's come together is quite different.

When are you planning to release the third installment?

I've just started writing, but I'm not sure how long it'll take me. There probably won't be so much of a gap this time.

You're touring throughout November. What do you enjoy most about the road and what do you find the hardest?

In terms of personal enjoyment, I'm looking forward to doing some more after-show sessions, which is something we established with Bellowhead, where we go to a pub nearby after the gig and play some folk tunes. We invite the audience along and that's always really fun; a great way to wind down after the gig. I'm looking forward to seeing how the new material works onstage too. It's not really until you perform songs live that they come alive. What's hardest? Sleeping! It's difficult being away from home too and not seeing the kids. But I'm hoping the family will come and see a gig this time.

You're something of a multi-instrumentalist. Give us a quick rundown of what you play...

In order of ability, I'd say fiddle, guitar, piano, concertina. Those four are my main ones. I play bits and bobs of other things. I suppose I'm alright at folk wind stuff, I play bagpipes and can play tin whistle.

You're a big fan of the open tunings too...

I am! I generally play, bottom to top, Bb, E, B, E, B, E, but then I half capo the top five strings, so you end up with sort of open B flat chords. That's my main tuning these days.

How did you first get into playing music?

I learned classical guitar from about five. Then as a teenager, I got an electric guitar and started playing in rock bands. I was really keen to play rock guitar, as most teenage boys are. That's until I got into folk music, aged 13 or 14. Listening to Jethro Tull led me onto Fairport Convention, then Martin Carthy. From rock, to folk-rock, to folk.

When did you first start writing and interpreting songs?

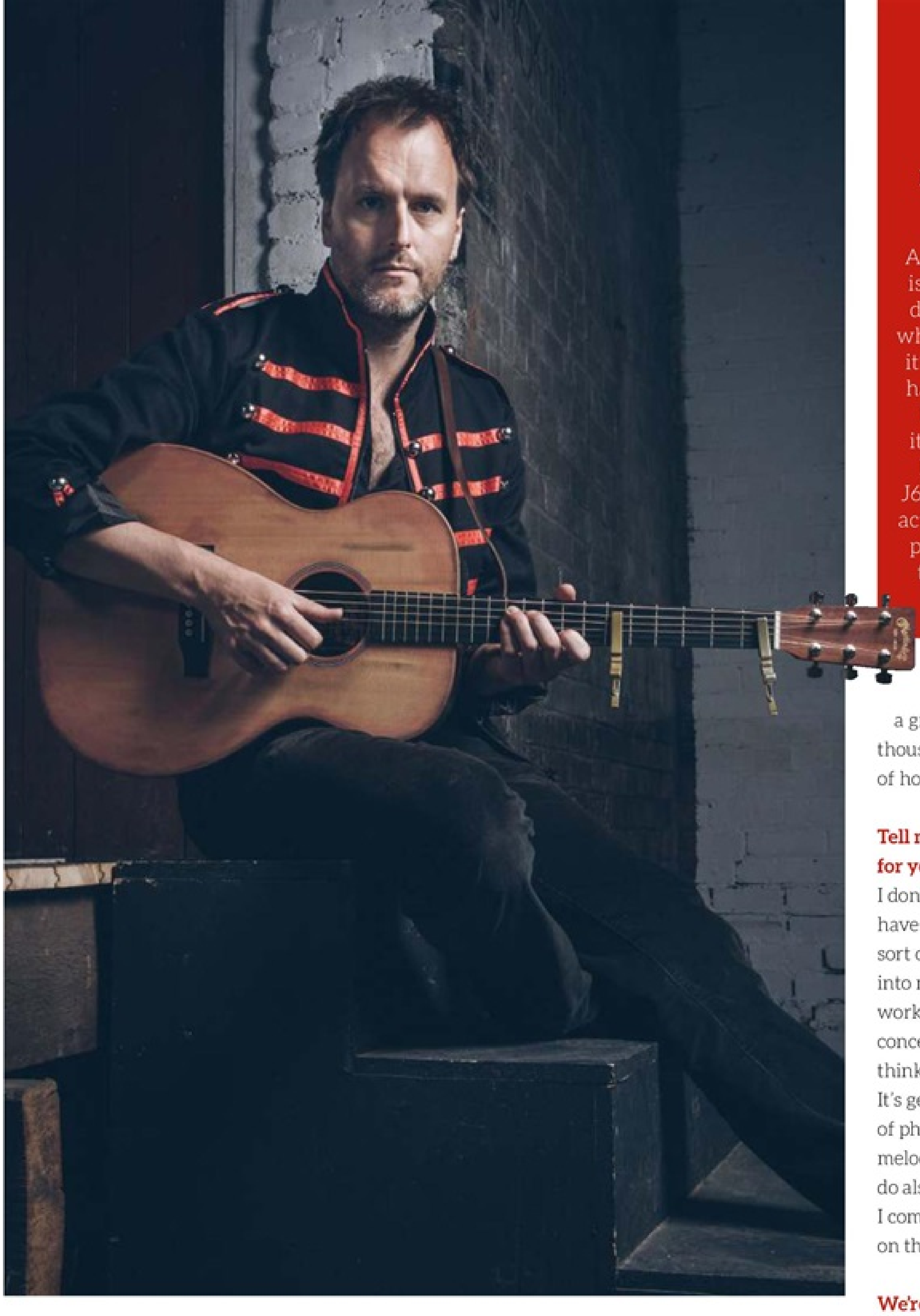
I remember writing songs in the first few weeks of secondary school, aged 11, after finding some other people who were into music. Nothing that you'd want to listen to... [laughs]. That was consistent until I got really into folk music, about 17. At that point I stopped writing songs because I got more interested in interpreting traditional songs. Including *Folk Song A Day*, I've released about 60 albums of traditional songs, whereas I've only written three albums of my own songs. So it's certainly been skewed to traditional interpretations so far, but I do feel like I'm entering a songwriting phase at the moment.

Were your parents musical?

They were musical, but we weren't particularly a musically-active family. My dad played piano and I remember playing stuff with him at home. I never went to a folk club until I was 21. But, yeah, my dad was musical and my mum has a cool record collection, that sort of thing.

It's over a year now since you left Bellowhead. Any regrets down the line?

I think it was definitely the right call and I don't have any regrets about it. That's not to say I don't miss it, I do absolutely, and knew



GEARBOX

I've recently got my first luthier-built, custom made guitar. It's a baritone acoustic built by Alan Arnold at Palladium Guitars, which is quite a beast, because I tune that down so the lowest string is low E, which is as low as a bass guitar. Then it's tuned to Bb, F, Bb, F, Bb, which I half capo. It's a 29" scale length and has some pretty hefty strings on it. I've also got a Martin 000X1AE. I have an arch top by Washburn J600, which is my only ever freebie, actually, I was given that by the kind people at Sound Technology. I play the Washburn through a Fender Blues Deluxe amp.

"Leaving Bellowhead was the right call. I don't have any regrets about it"

I would when I made the decision. I loved it. The last tour, in particular, was just fantastic. Incredible fun but also quite moving. Just a really lovely experience. Yeah, so I miss it, all the time really. I think we all do. The way everyone in the band is doing so many brilliant different things already demonstrates why it was time for us all to move on.

Any chance of a reunion down the line?

Sam [Sweeney] and Paul [Sartin] are in the Remnant Kings. I think John [Spires] and I will work together as a duo again at some point. We need to get together and work out some new material. Bellowhead reunion: not likely. For one, it's quite difficult getting 11 people together in the same room at the same time. But, also, because the final Bellowhead tour was so special, it was such a brilliant way to leave it. We're all mates still, so it's not out of the question, by any means, but unlikely.

What has been the highlight of your career so far?

The last few Bellowhead tours. It was a great privilege to be playing in front of thousands of people. Every night I was aware of how lucky I was to be doing it.

Tell me about the songwriting process for you?

I don't tend to write very much unless I have a particular task at hand. I'm not the sort of person who has songs just popping into mind. I have to have a thing which I'm working towards, which, I guess is why I write concept albums. I make myself sit down and think 'What song do I need to write now?'. It's generally lyric-led; getting the right kind of phrase that's at the heart of the song. The melodies kind of get built into the lyrics. But I do also write riff-based stuff sometimes, where I come up with something by mucking about on the guitar and then write a lyric to fit.

We're always keen to get some artist recommendations. Anyone floating your boat right now?

Jack Rutter, he's a fantastic guitarist and singer. He's got a new album, which is great. I've been enjoying Eliza Carthy and Wayward Band. But mostly I've been listening to Arcade Fire's new album, which is excellent.

Any advice for people reading?

I'd certainly recommend people try out open tunings. It amazes me how nervous people are about trying them. Which is a shame, because it's a whole different side of the instrument that you're just not getting. Martin Simpson's tuning, for instance, creates such a rich sound that you just cannot get with regular tunings. I'd really encourage people to experiment with open tunings. ■

Afterglow is out now on Hudson Records. Info: www.jonboden.com

BESSIE TURNER

Her latest single may be making big waves, but it hasn't been an easy ride for this young singer-guitarist, as George Henry King found out

After a troubling few years, Suffolk-based soloist, Bessie Turner may have just had the best six months of her life. Her debut single, 'Big Sleep', sprinkled the Radio 1 airwaves with an alt-rock elegance almost immediately after its release in April, and following a series of well-attended local shows, she was invited to grace the BBC Introducing stage at this year's Latitude Festival; something she did with a crowd-winning concoction of delicate melodies and vulnerability.

When we meet in Manningtree, two days before her second single 'Words You Say' is aired without warning on Jo Wiley's Radio 2 show, I too, much like the festivalgoers that Turner has entertained all summer, am instantly won over. Despite having just sprinted from her day job in order to expertly dodge the rush-hour traffic, Turner emerges from her cream Mini Cooper looking as star-like as she does in her music videos. At first glance, Turner's glitzy qualities could be interpreted as intimidating. But dig a little deeper and you'll find an artist as intriguing as she is apologetic for her 'post-work appearance', and above all else, as happy as she's ever been. However, her voyage into the often-turbulent waters of the music industry hasn't always been plain sailing. "I got really sick. It's kind of dark, how sick I got," she openly admits. "I was super poorly and I was diagnosed with a functional neurological disorder – I was given an MS (multiple sclerosis) diagnosis. I never wanted to stop doing music, it just happened."

Prior to becoming unwell, Turner had been playing occasionally in local pubs and frequently attending jam-nights in search of inspiration and at times, friendship. Her lack of finances, however, mirrored her lack of confidence and so, despite being an in-demand live musician and a small, dedicated fanbase who clamour for studio recordings of her music, Turner opted against professionally laying down any of her songs. After falling ill and being in a "shit relationship with a boyfriend who turned out to be a nasty guy", she eventually decided to embark on an indefinite hiatus – unwillingly turning her back on her love of music.

Three years on, however, and Turner's life couldn't be more different, living in a houseboat with her new boyfriend and drummer, Ben Ward. "I've always been very confident, but shy at the same time. And I've always been vulnerable and scared to say, 'I want to be a singer, that's all I want to do'. But Ben was like, 'Fuck, you're really, really good' and he battled with me for ages, trying to get me to record something, and I was like 'No, what's the point?'"

After a while, Ward's barrage of pestering and encouragement had a convincing effect. Accompanied with a batch of new songs – most of which took as long to write as they do to now play – Turner headed to The Crypt Studio in London to get to work with producer George Perks (The Darkness, Clean Bandit), while Ben carefully crafted her comeback behind the scenes. The sessions were a success and spawned the release of debut single 'Big Sleep' – a four-minute dose of melancholia, in which feelings of loneliness and exhaustion are explored.

The reaction that the track received undeniably catalysed Turner's return to music, and in hindsight, foreshadowed the unexpected opportunities bestowed upon her over the coming months – most notably her triumphant performance on the BBC Introducing stage at this year's Latitude Festival. "I joked last year when I went to Latitude that I was going to play this year," Turner recalls. "It was amazing and the biggest confidence boost in the world, but I get so unbelievably anxious, so I invited a couple of my friends who are like my sisters, I had a couple of beers and I got ready in really good time so I was relaxed. I just felt so overjoyed."

GEARBOX

"My Tanglewood guitar was the first guitar that I ever bought myself. I had some money saved - which I think was meant for a car – but I went into this nice little guitar shop called Rocket Music in Ipswich and I said that I wasn't really good at guitar and I needed one that would be easy to play. This elderly lady once owned my guitar, but she suffered from arthritis and so she gave it in and I bought it."

"After my MS diagnosis, I didn't want to stop doing music, it just happened"

Having been away from the Suffolk live circuit for the best part of three years, however, Turner's initial delight at the invite was quickly replaced by a feeling that she was not quite good enough to be there – which fans will almost certainly dispute. She was also ecstatic to learn she'd be performing in front of, acoustic singer-songwriter, Lucy Rose. "I loved her when I was a teenager. So, on the press day I was just shaking. I had woken up in a bit of a tizz, I'd had a bad night's sleep the night before and I hadn't put any make-up on.

"I was on my way to the press day and I was running late, so I stopped at Tesco and stole a concealer tester. Then all of a sudden, I'm surrounded by all these people: Ben Lovett from Mumford and Sons and Lucy Rose! After that, I knew the rest of Latitude would be easy, because they wouldn't be watching."

Despite her summer of success, relying solely on the minimal income that gigging and record sales occasionally gifts a musician, isn't always financially viable – even when they're performing at major festivals and being played on the biggest radio station in the world. Turner currently still holds down a variety of jobs and she's quick to point out that she only got paid £12.50 for a show she played recently. But that's fine by Turner, because whether these past six months have been the best of her life or not, she remains sensible and level-headed enough to not take anything for granted.

"I think to say 'I want to sell millions of record' is such a brave thing to do. I've met loads of people who are like 'I'm going to be so successful' and I just hope they don't get hurt. I don't want to commit to the idea of having to be successful, but I don't want to fail either." ■

Bessie Turner's new single, 'Words You Say' is out now via Don't Try Records. Info: www.facebook.com/bessieturnermusic/

NIKHIL D'SOUZA

One-time Bollywood backing singer Nikhil D'Souza is set to become known in his own right for his self-penned, radio-friendly love songs. We found out more

You can't keep a good man down: Mumbai-born Nikhil D'Souza would surely agree. Having earned a crust for himself as a playback singer (whereby a professional singer provides a vocal for an actor to mime along to) for major Bollywood films such as *Anjaana Anjaani* and *Queen*, this Jeff Buckley-inspired singer-guitarist's long-term goal was always nevertheless to get his own original songs out there.

And he's certainly well on his way to doing so, having signed a deal with Warner Music label East West Records, alongside help from some of the US's top producers, and headlined South Asia's biggest talent show.

Where are you now and what are you up to?
I'm in London, working on completing the final few tracks for the record, and playing as many gigs as possible, as an introduction to a new audience.

How would you describe your sound to people who might not have heard your music before?
I place myself in the alternative pop/rock/folk space – somewhere between Jeff Buckley and Ray Lamontagne

What can we expect from the new record?
I'm working really hard to make it an album I can be proud of. I'm a fan of albums that explore the different sides and musicality of an artist, the ones that don't just stick to one sound for every song. That's what people will hear from my record too.

Are you happy with how it's coming along?
It's almost there, and it's turning out even better than I imagined – thanks to my team and great inputs from our A&R, Ric Salmon.

What are your plans for the rest of the year?
We're all very excited that single 'Beautiful Mind' is getting lots of radio play, which was unexpected, so who knows what the next

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few months will bring. I expect I will be busy playing gigs and festivals around the UK.

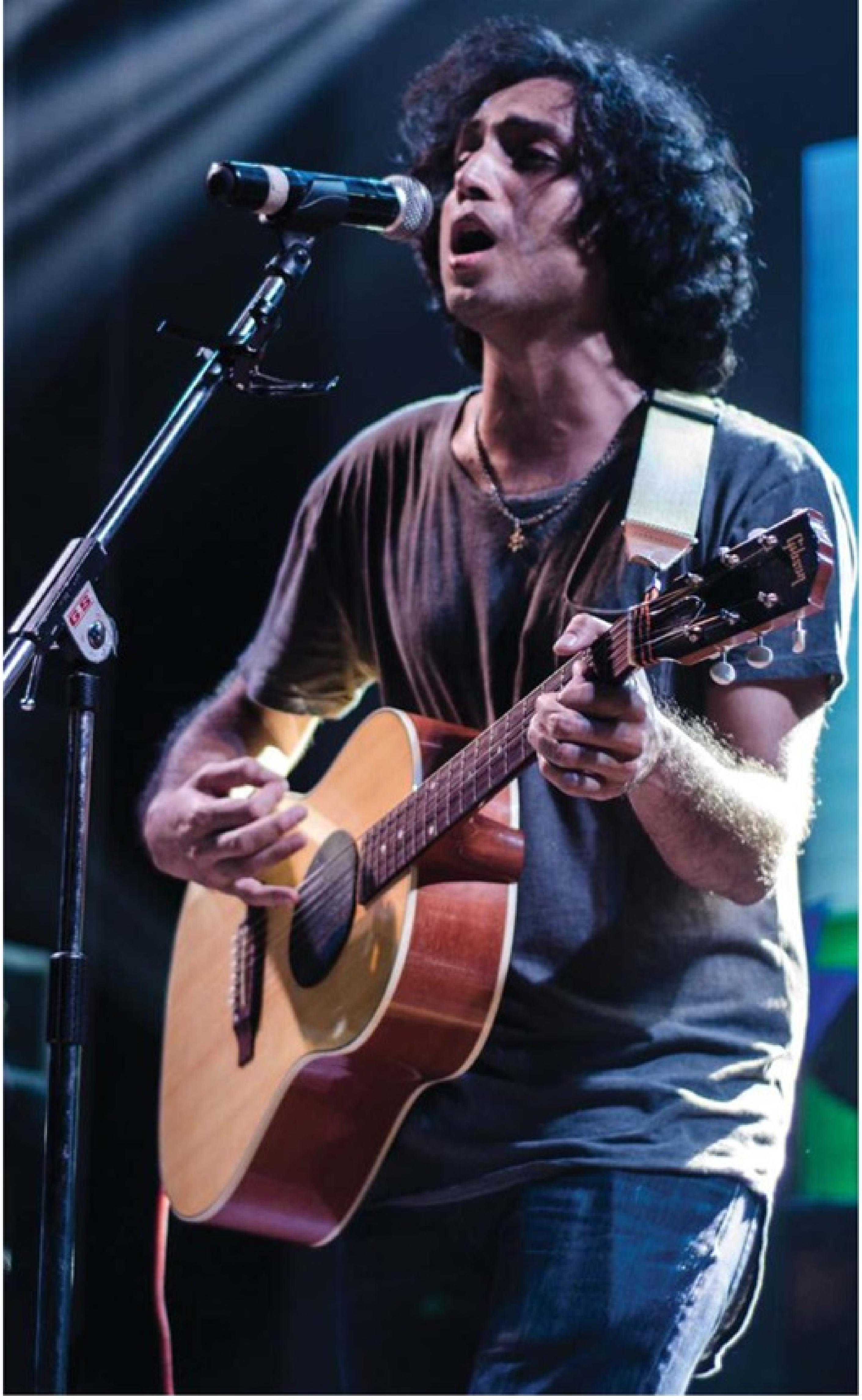
What is planned for 2018?
Release the album early in the year, and see how deep the rabbit hole goes.

How did you first get into playing the guitar?
I was fascinated by the instrument when I saw the other boys in my apartment building playing it. I took it up, learned really fast, wanting to be able to accompany myself when I sang.

Who were your early musical influences?
I used to listen to all the popular acts back then – Dire Straits, Simon and Garfunkel, Eric Clapton. Later I discovered Sting, the Police, Damien Rice, and then Jeff Buckley.

Who is inspiring you these days?
I really like how Ben Howard pulls off an amazing live sound and hasn't given in to the lure of commercial music.

> "Save up and find that one really great instrument that you can't stop playing"



What are you using in your live set?
I keep it simple, using a Santa Cruz Vintage Artist acoustic guitar with a K&K Mini Western Passive pickup, fitted with John Alvey Turner 12 to 54 phosphor bronze strings. I use a Radial Tonebone D.I. box to sweeten the signal a bit before it gets to the mixer.

How about in your personal collection. Any notable instruments?
The Santa Cruz VA is my prized possession, I also have a Gibson LG-2 American Eagle that's super compact and sounds great for the small size.

Tell us about your songwriting process...
Most of my songs deal with emotional melancholy, which is what resonates most with me. When writing, I pick up the guitar, allow my fingers to just go where they like, make mistakes, try random voicings – just so I'm not restricted to what I already know. Sometimes you can stumble upon a great melody from doing that. I then come up with a thought and words that fall most naturally into that melodic phrase and take it from there lyrically.

What has been the highlight of your career so far?
Probably opening for the Zac Brown side project Sir Roosevelt at the Scala in London earlier this year. Then again that would compete with 'Beautiful Mind', my very first single, getting playlisted on Radio 2.

Which artist, dead or alive, would you most like to perform with?
Jeff Buckley's been my biggest inspiration. So yeah, he would be it.

Which song do you most wish that you had written?
'Mama You've Been On My Mind' – Bob Dylan.

If you had some advice for guitarists and performers reading this, what would it be?
I'd say keep it simple. Save up and find that one really great instrument that you can't stop playing. In time it will become an extension of you. ■

'Beautiful Mind' is out now.
Info: www.eastwestrecords.co.uk/artists/nikhil-dsouza/

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6 String Acoustics

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4612 - Dave King Katrina OOO Model, Sunburst
4770 - EKO Ranger Vintage Acoustic, Natural
13544 - Eko Oliveiro Pigini Ltd Edition Acoustic
13552 - Eko Vintage Ranger 6 in Black, Reissue
15233 - Faith FKN Naked Neptune Acoustic Guitar
14718 - Faith FMSB45 BNC Classic Burst Mercury
14715 - Faith FRSB45 Drop Dreadnought
16482 - Fender CC60S 3-Tone Sunburst
16484 - Fender CC60S 3-Tone Natural
16533 - Fender CC60SCE LH Lefthanded, Natural
15988 - Fender CD60 Acoustic Pack, Natural
16481 - Fender CP60S Parlour Acoustic Guitar Nat
16483 - Fender CP60S Parlour Acoustic, Sunburst
16476 - Fender FA115 Acoustic Guitar Pack
15197 - Fender PM1 Standard Dreadnought, Natural
15500 - Fender Sonoran 3/4 Mini Acoustic Guitar
13614 - K Yairi YT1 Acoustic Guitar
13386 - Landola D85 Dreadnought Acoustic, Used
8308 - Levin SW203 Acoustic Guitar, Black, USED
15927 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Nat, Used
13824 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Natural
13064 - Martin D18 Dreadnought, Secondhand
5702 - Martin D28 Dreadnought, Natural
6008 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Natural
6007 - Martin OM21 Orchestra, Natural
16422 - Recording King Ros 10
11149 - Seagull Excursion Natural Folk SG
16585 - Stonebridge G23CR, Cutaway
0000 - Tanglewood - 6 Models In Stock Now
15980 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf.Pro X15NS
13910 - The Cort AF510OP Acoustic Folk Guitar
8007 - Vintage V2000MGG Giltrap Mahog Acoustic
13269 - Vintage V400CSB, Cherry Sunburst
12437 - Yairi FY84 OM Folk Acoustic Guitar
16570 - Yairi GW1100 Acoustic Guitar, Secondhand
5632 - Yamaha F310 Dreadnought, Natural
14426 - Yamaha F310 Dreadnought Tobacco Sunburst
14483 - Yamaha FS720S Acoustic, Black
15577 - Yamaha LL26 Handcrafted Jumbo Acoustic
15576 - Yamaha LS26 A.R.E. II Handcrafted Guitar

6 String Electro Acoustics

13866 - Breedlove Discovery Concert CE, Sunburst
15224 - Breedlove Pursuit Concert Acoustic
16244 - Breedlove Pursuit Dreadnought Ebony
15887 - Breedlove Stage Dreadnought, Natural
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
13911 - Cort AF510EOP Electro Acoustic Guitar
15993 - Crafter DE6N Electro Acoustic Guitar
4769 - EKO Ranger EQ Vintage Series, Black
16599 - Faith FKSE Naked Saturn Electro Acoustic
9543 - Faith FSCETB Saturn Dreadnought Electro
16488 - Fender CC140SCE Electro Acoustic, Natural
14730 - Fender CD100CE Left-Handed Cutaway
16487 - Fender CD140SCE, Cutaway Electro, Nat
16478 - Fender CD60S LH Left-Handed Acoustic
16486 - Fender CD60SCE Black
16485 - Fender CD60SCE Natural
16489 - Fender CT140SE Travel Guitar, Natural
16490 - Fender PM1 E Ltd Adirondack Dreadnought
16514 - Fender PM3 Ltd Adirondack Triple-0 Mahog
16515 - Fender PM3 Ltd Adirondack Triple-0 Rwood
15355 - Fender PM3 Dlx Triple-0 Vintage Sunburst
16409 - Fender PM3 Standard Triple 0, Natural
6932 - Fender Sonoran SCE Dreadnought, Natural
15525 - Fender Sonoran SCE, Candy Apple Red
16479 - Fender Sonoran SCE, Lake Placid Blue
10243 - Fender Tim Armstrong Hellcat
16415 - Freshman FA1 CEM Electro Acoustic, Used
16564 - Gibson Chet Atkins Solid Body Nylon Used
9700 - Gibson J45 Custom Electro Acoustic
15987 - Gretsch G5022CE Rancher Savannah Sunset
15985 - Gretsch G5031FT Rancher Dread., Sunburst
15600 - Jimmy Moon 0003 Acoustic, Secondhand
8091 - Jimmy Moon 0003CE Electro Acoustic
4555 - Jimmy Moon Bryan Adams Signature
9552 - LAG T300AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
15900 - Lakewood A22 Custom Made, Secondhand
14129 - Luna Heartsong Series Parlor Electro
15764 - Maestro Raffles Purple heart Electro
12792 - Maestro Rosetta MDT Dreadnought Electro

6 String Electro Acoustics

14814 - Maestro Singa M-CSB-C AI Solid Med.Jumbo
15759 - Maestro Vera MR-CSB-AAll Solid
13718 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
15762 - Maestro Victoria K 000 with LR Baggs
15747 - Maestro Victoria WE 000 with LR Baggs
12225 - Martin & Co 000X1AE Electro Acoustic
12222 - Martin & Co DX1AE Electro Acoustic
15164 - Martin 000RS1 Electro Acoustic Guitar
15592 - Martin 0015E Retro Non-Cutaway Electro
8277 - Martin DC15ME Dreadnought Cutaway
16121 - Martin DC28E Dreadnought Electro, Used
15487 - Martin DCPA4 Electro Acoustic, Shaded
8010 - Martin DRS1 All Mahogany Dreadnought
16139 - Martin Ed Sheeran 3 ÷ Signature Edition
15591 - Martin GPC18E Electro Acoustic Guitar
15486 - Martin GPCPA4 Electro Acoustic Shaded
16545 - Martin OM28 Standard Series
12438 - Northwood Custom Myrtle 80 Series D/nought
15548 - Ovation 1771 AX Standard Balladeer, CBB
14913 - PJ Eggle Linville Cutaway Elec/Acoustic
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
14915 - PJ Eggle Parlour Electro Acoustic
10095 - RainSong BI-JM1000N2 Graphite Guitar
10094 - RainSong BI-OM1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
10038 - RainSong BI-WS1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
9821 - Rainsong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - Rainsong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
9815 - Rainsong JM1000 Graphite Guitar
4812 - RainSong OM1000N2 Electro Acousti
10082 - RainSong P12 Parlor
10086 - RainSong P14 Parlor
9827 - RainSong SG Shorty Gloss, Secondhand
7974 - Rainsong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
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8234 - Satori YD42EQ Electro Acoustic, Vint Nat
5255 - Satori YO28HEQ, OM Electro, Natural
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15787 - Tanglewood TVC X MP Electro Acoustic
15786 - Tanglewood TW28CE X OV
15583 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BK
15584 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BR
4187 - Tanglewood TW40 OANE Orchestra
12689 - Tanglewood TW45 EG E Super Folk Cutaway
15497 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Burgandy
15496 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, White
15902 - Tanglewood TWCR SFCE Super Folk
15977 - Tanglewood Sundance X15 SDTE
15982 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf Pro X45-AVE
15979 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf. Pro X47E
15978 - Tanglewood X70 Electro Acoustic Guitar
16583 - Taylor 414CE N Nylon String Electro, Used
13485 - Taylor 515CE Electro Acoustic, Used
14419 - Vintage Pilgrim VPG900 Mayflower Deluxe
15850 - Vintage Gordon Giltrap Signature
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15442 - Ashbury Rathlin Irish Bouzouki
13527 - Blue Moon BB15 Bouzouki GR33001
15435 - Blue Moon Irish Bouzouki, Pear Shape
12568 - Fender Concert Tone "F" 63S Mandolin
14741 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin "A" 53S
15532 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin Pack
9240 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
15598 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
4564 - Jimmy Moon Bouzouki, Nat
4563 - Jimmy Moon Octave Mandolin (Mandola) Nat
4553 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin
15599 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin, K&K Pickup
15768 - Ortega RMA40SBK Mandolin, Black
8315 - Westcoast M20 Mandolin Sunburst
12347 - Westcoast M20S Mandolin Sunburst

Classical Guitars

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15547 - David Pelter Handmade Classical Guitar
7366 - Jose Ferrer 1/2 Classical Guitar
7365 - Jose Ferrer 3/4 Size Classical, Used
12622 - Jose Ferrer 4/4 Full-Size Classical
16036 - Mendieta Artizan W Classical Guitar
16035 - Mendieta Artizan X Classical Guitar
16034 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar
16033 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar
6776 - Mendieta Conservatoire B Classical
8507 - Mendieta Conservatoire C Classical
16045 - Mendieta Conservatoire D Classical
16058 - Mendieta Estudiante Classica Classical
6779 - Mendieta Estudio P Classical Guitar
6778 - Mendieta Estudio R Classical Guitar
12238 - Mendieta Estudio VCE Electro Classical
16038 - Mendieta Professional Classica
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15719 - Ortega HoneySuite CE Nylon String Guitar
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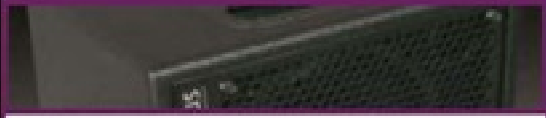
15239 - Ramirez 2NCWE Classical Guitar
15236 - Ramirez 4NE Classical Guitar
5644 - Ramirez George Harrison Model Classical
15237 - Ramirez RA Classical Guitar
15238 - Ramirez RB Classical Guitar
6027 - Ramirez S1 Classical Guitar
12761 - Ramirez SP Classical Guitar
10999 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Red
14720 - Yamaha C40II Full Size Classical Guitar
16269 - Yamaha CG170SA, Secondhand
14721 - Yamaha CX40 Mark II Electro-Classical
16057 - Mendieta Estudiante Classic 3/4 Pequeno
16051 - Mendieta Estudio P Pequeno 3/4 Size
16326 - Stagg C405 Linden 1/4 Classical Guitar
16060 - Stagg C410 1/2 Size Classical Guitar
15290 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar, Black
15289 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
15292 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar Red
15858 - Stagg C432 3/4 Size Classical Guitar

12 Strings

16506 - Fender CD-140SCE 12-String, Natural
16529 - Fender CD60SCE 12-String, Natural
16141 - Takamine GJ72CE 12 Sunburst, Used
10991 - Tanglewood TRD12 Lefty 12 Acoustic, Nat

Acoustic Amplification



5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"
9494 - AER Compact 60 Mk III
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8
14504 - AER Compact 60 SLOPE
5707 - AER Compact Classic Pro - 60W, 1x8"
5708 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Mobile - 60W, 1x8
4945 - AER Compact XL - 200W, 2x8"
9028 - AER Domino 3 200w Watt Acoustic Amp
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Sig.Compact 60
13905 - Blackstar ID Core BEAM Bluetooth Amp
15917 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live Acoustic Amp
15918 - Boss Acoustic Singer Pro Acoustic Amp
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
8166 - Fender Acoustasonic 150 Acoustic Combo
16480 - Fender Acoustic 100 Acoustic Amp Combo
5286 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4"
15775 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4", Ex-Demo
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
11129 - Roland AC40 Acoustic Guitar Amplifier
6505 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30w, 2x6.5
9383 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Guitar Combo, RW
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
5574 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
14941 - Tanglewood TBA5 5 Watt Acoustic Amp
16030 - Tanglewood TBA5 5W Acoustic Amp, Used
16469 - Vox VX50AG Acoustic Amp
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Ukuleles

14699 - Barnes & Mullins UBJ1 Banjo Ukulele
16390 - Baton Rouge UR11S Soprano Ukulele
16198 - Baton Rouge UR3B Baritone Ukulele
15559 - Baton Rouge UR4C Concert Ukulele
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
14648 - Baton Rouge UR4TCE Electro Tenor Ukulele
16226 - Baton Rouge UR4TCE Electro Tenor LEFTY
16388 - Baton Rouge V1S Nat Soprano Ukulele
14650 - Baton Rouge V4TCE Electro Tenor Uke
15790 - Deering Goodtime Tenor Banjo Uke, Used
10386 - Fender Mino'Aka Koa CE Concert Uke
13616 - Fender Pia'ia Soprano Ukulele
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia
15833 - Korala UKS32 Soprano Ukulele
13979 - Laka Soprano Ukulele with Case
10372 - Magic Fluke M10 Concert Ukulele, Natural
15691 - Mahalo MR1 Soprano Ukulele, Black
12224 - Martin & Co C1K Koa Concert Ukulele
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
13679 - Nukulele "Abbots Digit" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
13680 - Nukulele "Brown Ale" Bottle Ukulele
13681 - Nukulele "Helles Bier" Bottle Ukulele
13683 - Nukulele Lemonade Bottle Ukulele
13682 - Nukulele Slainte Bottle Ukulele
7102 - Ohana CK10 Concert Ukulele in Mahogany
13638 - Ohana CK22 Concert Ukulele
16104 - Ohana CK35G-5 5-String Concert Ukulele
8513 - Ohana CK50MG Concert Ukulele
16016 - Ohana CK70BA Concert Ukulele
8516 - Ohana PK25G Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
15956 - Ohana SK16 Soprano Ukulele
4711 - Ohana SK20 Soprano Ukulele Uke
15960 - Ohana SK21A Ukulele Rosewood Sopranino
13626 - Ohana SK22 Soprano Ukulele
13642 - Ohana SK23 Soprano Ukulele
4710 - Ohana SK25 Soprano Ukulele
15957 - Ohana SK28 Soprano Uke
15959 - Ohana SK35GS Solid Mahogany Gloss
9052 - Ohana SK38 Soprano Uke, Mahogany
9529 - Ohana SK50MG Soprano Ukulele
4714 - Ohana SK50WG Soprano Ukulele
14508 - Ohana SK70L Soprano Ukulele, Lacewood
4465 - Ohana TK20 Tenor Ukulele
16062 - Ohana TK22 Tenor Ukulele
4706 - Ohana TK35G Tenor Ukulele
9049 - Ohana TK35G5 5 String Tenor Uke
16063 - Ohana TK35G5 5 String Tenor Ukulele
12184 - Ohana TK50MG Tenor Ukulele
9526 - Ohana TK50WG Tenor Ukulele
16089 - Ohana TK52 Tenor Ukulele
16103 - Ohana TK72 Tenor Ukulele
12390 - Ohana Soprano Uke Gig Bag
13311 - Ohana Concert Uke Gig Bag
16021 - Ohana CK80 Solid Cedar Top Concert Uke
16017 - Ohana Ukuleles SK-30M Large Neck Soprano
16020 - Ohana Ukuleles TK70-6 6-string Tenor
16019 - Ohana Ukuleles TK70-8 8-string Tenor
12740 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Resonator Ukulele
10384 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, UKS363MP
16199 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, Black
10385 - Risa UKS385MP Solid Concert Electro Uke
10426 - Uluru III Tenor Ukulele
16454 - Uluru Koa I All Solid Koa Soprano Uke
10424 - Uluru Lehua I Soprano Ukulele
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16286 - JN Cigar Box Puncheon Cask Guitar
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14472 - Luna Safari Starry Night 3/4 Travel Guitar
15432 - Luna Safari Tattoo
16139 - Martin Ed Sheeran 3 ÷ Signature Edition
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14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel
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W

WILLIE WATSON

The new instalment in Willie Watson's Folk Singer series is here. The singer and collector sat down with Acoustic to tell us more

WORDS: GLENN KIMPTON

Back in 2014, ex Old Crow Medicine Show founder and guitarist Willie Watson struck out alone and released ten traditional songs under the guidance of Dave Rawlings to critical acclaim and delighted fans. The simple one man and a guitar (or banjo) set up was bold and the songs on *Folk Singer Vol.1* were perennial and robust. Thankfully, it's time for the next volume, and it's an album Willie is actually happy with... "I do really like this record, yeah," he grins.

"I think it's the first that I've ever recorded where I'm still excited about it now. I'll still like this one later down the road, whereas a lot of times before, whether with Old Crow or even *Folk Singer Vol.1*, I'd like it for a week or two and then I won't listen to it for ages. But I didn't even hear *Folk Singer Vol.1* at all, except one time when I listened to it with Dave when it was mastered. And then a year or so later I heard bits of it and I really didn't like it; I didn't like my performances or how it came out."

It's a surprising response for this writer, having had *Vol.1* high on the favourite discs from that year, but who knows what the artist hears that we don't? "Well, I think it was so early on in the solo thing that I didn't have my head wrapped around the songs and I hadn't played them enough." He pauses a moment. "Well some of them anyway, some of the others I thought were fine." A short laugh. "But anyway, back to two!" Onwards and upwards it seems, because *Vol.2* is a very fine recording of traditional songs indeed, treated with the utmost skill and respect by Willie and again-producer Dave Rawlings [interviewed on p28]. It seems Willie is in no hurry to start penning his own tunes. "In a way this is a continuation of the first album," he explains. "Some of the songs, like 'On the Road Again' I've been playing for many years, and I've always got my ears open and I'm always listening to music, especially these days. I'm not focused on being a songwriter at all, so I just try to find these songs; or they find me, because you can't look too hard, but I keep adding to this list that I have. I've probably got a hundred or more now, which just get whittled down. Sometimes I get frustrated and say 'there's no more good folk songs! I did the best ones on that first record and I don't know what to do now!' And then I'll think, 'wait a minute man, there's millions'..." And he breaks off laughing.

One of the traditional songs tackled on the new set is 'Gallows Pole', a centuries-old piece well known for Leadbelly's interpretation and, probably most famously, Led Zeppelin's, from their 1970 album *III*. Willie's is boldly short and spare and all the more effective for it. "Yeah I do think that people in their 30s or older are very aware of the song through Led Zeppelin, but I'm not sure about younger people," Willie says. "Sometimes these songs have been right in front of you the whole time and it's just something you're not thinking of and you need to hear it pop up on some Folkways compilation or something. There are some people who do what I do, but search hard for the very obscure songs; I don't really know what value that has..." He stops a moment to gather. "How do I say this without sounding mean?" he laughs. "It's like people think it's cooler and a little more hip to be the guy who goes and finds all the old songs nobody's ever heard of and then they're this scholar of old-time music and know more than the next guy. I think that's ridiculous; the reason that everybody knows 'Midnight Special', 'Gallows Pole' and 'Samson and Delilah' is because they're better songs! There's a lot of this old music that isn't good, just like any genre of music. There's a whole bunch of it that I can't listen to; I put on this Smithsonian Folkways field recordings double album and I couldn't listen to it! It's a good record of history, but that doesn't mean it's a good record. I can only listen to about three Carter Family songs too, and I know they're great, but I still can't do much of it. So I try to put a good mix on mine, with some obscure stuff, as long as it's a good song. But I put the popular ones on there too because they're usually better songs."

"There's a lot of old music that isn't good, just like with any genre of music"

The track that leapt from the speaker on the first volume was 'Kitty Puss', a playfully dark old dance tune, and the same reaction from the new set was had from 'Walking Boss', a haunting version of an old Clarence Ashley work song, with its 'walking boss, no I don't belong to you / I belong to that steel drivin' crew' lyric. It's a wonderful

point in the record that grabs your attention. "I loved how that one came out," he agrees. "Like with 'Kitty Puss' on the first record, Dave said 'Oh, just sing a song to test the microphones'. It was the same deal with 'Walking Boss'; it's not one I would have considered putting on the record, but I just really liked how it sounded.

"In fact, sonically, I'm really pleased with how this one turned out; Dave and Matt Andrews the engineer did a great job on it. The 'pop' at the top of that ['Walking Boss'] song is the dream sound I wanted my guitar to make. It was like 'there it is!' and it was one of my favourite moments."

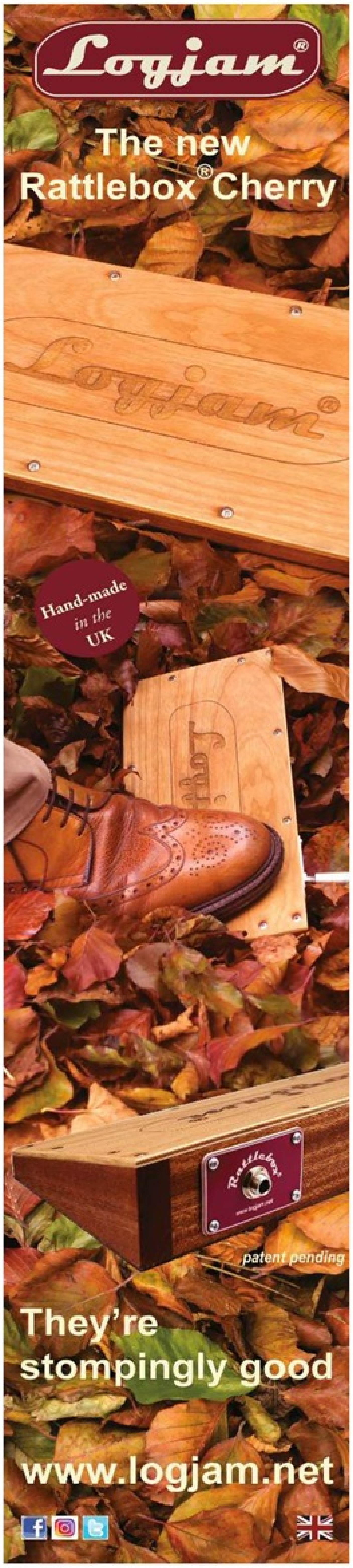
As with all Acony Records releases, everything is done through analogue methods, which Willie considers important. "Oh absolutely man, it sounds really good," he says, immediately. "I think when you try to record digitally with acoustic instruments it loses a lot. Especially with an acoustic guitar, digital recording really doesn't do it justice. I think before I never really knew the difference, but once you do it right on tape and you compare the two, I just think why in the world would you intentionally make it sound worse?" Interestingly, when it comes to Willie's Larrivee acoustic, his preference for simplicity comes through every time.

When he's not playing his wonderful old Gibson resonator five string banjo, he will invariably have the modest, scuffed unbound sapele and spruce OM-1 strapped to him, even with more expensive instruments at home. "I've had that guitar for many, many years now, and I really don't know if I'll ever play another one," he says, rather wistfully. "I've got a [OM] 50 at home, but this one seems to have more life in it. They both have this dry tone, which I like, but the 50 has a little more low end, which you would think would be better as it's just me, giving me a little something to sing over, but every time I take it out, the OM-1 still wins."

> **"With acoustic guitar, digital really doesn't do it justice"**

Willie has stripped the already minimal Larrivee back further, taking off the pickguard and removing the pickup that was there when he bought it. "I think there being no binding on there or anything else for the sound to go through makes a difference. It's a tight sounding guitar and it's been put together tightly too. It used to have an LR Baggs M-1 soundhole pickup, but when I split from [Old Crow], I didn't want it there for the solo shows, so I took it out and went and got a mahogany dowel from a hardware store. I re-drilled the hole and then plugged it up, cut it off and sanded it down. I just knew I wasn't going to use it again and I didn't want to have to play the guitar through a DI and make it sound bad." ■

***Folk Singer Vol.2* is out now on Acony Records.**
Info: www.williewatson.com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KELE OKEREKE

Twelve years after becoming a sensation with Bloc Party, British songwriter Kele Okereke has overcome his acoustic nervousness for his third solo album

WORDS: GEORGE HENRY KING **PHOTOS:** RACHAEL WRIGHT

Not long after exploding onto the scene in 2005 as the frontman of British rock band Bloc Party, Kele Okereke unfairly gained a reputation for being somewhat of a 'difficult' person to interview. As a successful, gay and black musician performing a genre of music that had thus far been dominated by white, heterosexual males, music journalists saw Okereke – perhaps subconsciously, perhaps not – as a kink in the indie-rock chain. Questions about his sexuality and ethnicity, for example, often included an underlying sub-text, and as Okereke grew tired of such interrogation, journalists started to approach interviews with him in a hostile and antagonistic manner.

Twelve years on, however, his attitude towards being interviewed appears to have changed. During our time together in the back garden of his South London home, he cracks jokes and relaxingly rocks back and forth on a wooden chair that sounds as though it could break at any minute.

His personality is warm and humbled and his casual attire suggests that he is both physically and mentally at ease; there's an air of contentment. But his interview etiquette is not the only thing that's altered.

The arrival of his first child, Savannah, last December encouraged him to kick some of his bad habits ("I'm not going to say what they are," he smiles), and Okereke, now 35, has maturely acknowledged that he is entering a different phase in his life.

"I knew I had to change and I knew that there were certain things that couldn't carry on – everything before this has gone. You have to say 'you're not a rockstar now', because you've got be a rock and give stability to someone else and that's what the album is about really."

The album Okereke is referring to is *Fatherland*, his new solo record and his third away from the democratic constraints of Bloc Party's collaborative writing process. Those who have become accustomed to Okereke's not-so-secret desire to musically challenge himself and produce the unexpected with each album – be it a Bloc Party or solo LP – won't be surprised to hear that it sounds nothing at all like any of its predecessors. But they might, however, be caught off guard by the road that Okereke has this time decided to venture down.

Where his first two solo albums – *The Boxer* (2010) and *Trick* (2014) – saw Okereke swap the electric guitar for electronic beats.

> "The thought of making an acoustic album made me feel nervous, so I had to do it"

Fatherland sees Okereke at perhaps his most vulnerable, instinctive and intimate. His voice is deeper and softer, and his lyrics are eloquently pronounced over musical soundscapes that are primarily driven by the acoustic guitar – an instrument that Okereke, due to his negative preconceptions of singer-songwriters, has always neglected.

"I've always had a slight aversion to singer-songwriter music," he admits. "But I've started to appreciate the music more and I've started to see that actually, there is something very powerful about just an instrument with a voice. There's a stillness and an honesty to it, and the thought of making an acoustic album made me feel nervous, so I had to do it."

Okereke first started amassing ideas and writing songs for *Fatherland* towards the end of 2015, and the demoing process took place a couple of months later. At the time, Okereke was also on the verge of releasing his fifth album with Bloc Party, and so between fulfilling his tour duties with his band, Okereke spent time in Portland, Oregon, where he laid down the entirety of his new solo album in just ten days, with an ensemble of 20 different musicians. But despite the studio being isolated at the top of a hill and surrounded by a gloriously colorful and beautiful forest – the type of environment that usually has a calming effect on Okereke – having to work quickly and to a rigid deadline proved to be stressful.

"The first day we got there, nothing worked," he laughs. "So, we had to sort that out and then there was a constant sense that 'we've got to get this done in time'. But I don't mind that because I feel like a little bit of pressure forces you to reach for your best, so those types of high-pressure situations usually don't faze me. Too much stress can be debilitating, but a little bit can make diamonds."

Whilst *Fatherland* might act as the full stop at the end of the first sentence of Okereke life, its core themes are also very much concerned with the idea of looking forward to what it will be like to be a father, his relationship with his partner and not adhering to society's deluded vision of the perfect family.

Today, Okereke's mother is spending the afternoon taking care of Savannah in the living room, whilst he opens up his home to *Acoustic*. Every now and then I catch Okereke glimpsing through the backdoor, keeping an eye on his daughter. As an outsider, his domestic lifestyle does seem pretty perfect. His daughter usually sleeps throughout the night, he says, and in becoming a father himself,

Okereke's relationship with his own father – a man who he's never entirely seen eye to eye with – is stronger than it's ever been. Getting to this point, however, wasn't easy. Savannah was conceived via a surrogacy in the US – something that Okereke thought "wouldn't happen in my lifetime, even though I wanted it to" – and the entire process took an agonising three years. If nothing else, it gave Okereke and his partner time to prepare.

"This has been a process of preparing ourselves and myself for her. I was kind of scared a lot last year because I didn't really know what it was going to be like. But I feel as soon as Savannah was born something clicked in me and it was like a light bulb went on and there was a shift. I haven't been on tour yet, though, and the thought of going on tour for weeks or months at a time... I don't really see how I can do that."

Earlier this year, after setting a precedent with the release of *Fatherland* single, 'Grounds For Resentment' – a track on which he sings a romantic duet with fellow gay musician, Olly Alexandra – Okereke called for other gay artists to be more real and honest when expressing their same sex desires in lyrics. When we talk about the track, he suggests that many up and coming artists perhaps shy away from using pronouns such as 'he' or 'him' when singing about love and lust, because they fear they might not get played on the radio or they'll be pigeonholed. Whilst Okereke assures me he was never "told not to talk about certain things" in his lyrics – although "there was a vibe that maybe it isn't so good to put yourself out there completely" – he rightly states that attitudes still need to change.

"As a gay artist and a gay person, I'm completely bombarded with images of heterosexual romance in music, film and literature and I've had enough of that. There are other stories and other ways to see the world, and now that I've reached this point in my life, I've realised that I need to be presenting and exploring those other ways to see the world."

Towards the end of our conversation, I ask Okereke if, in light of his new role as a father, he'd consider quitting music. Realising as I said it that, perhaps quite harshly, I'm asking him to choose between the two loves of his life, I suggest that such a question might be a difficult one to answer. To my relief, Okereke doesn't think so.

"No, it isn't a difficult one," he instantly replies. "I could quite conceivably stop doing music to look after Savannah. I'm in a position where I don't need to do music anymore, because I'm not a materialistic person and I've been very sensible with what I've earned. I make more money not doing music, than I do making music. When I want time off, I can take time off. If I want to quit, I can quit."

Soon after, droplets of rain start to freckle the piece of paper on which my interview questions are written, bringing our time together to a sudden end. As I leave, he politely wishes me a good day and thanks me for coming. In my eyes at least, his reputation for being a difficult person to interview, will no longer precede him. ■

***Fatherland* is out now.**
Info: www.kele.lnk.to/FatherlandPR

> **"When we first started out, I wasn't as confident having my name on an album cover"**

DAVID

RAWLINGS

Back with his third solo album, David Rawlings talks borrowing and transforming to keep the spirit of folk music alive

WORDS: DAN HOBSON

David Rawlings is a man of many talents. Singer, Grammy-nominated songwriter, producer, award-winning guitarist, Rawlings is a man who truly lives and breathes music. Since launching his career with 1996's *Revival* – an album billed under Gillian Welch's name, but featuring the indispensable co-writing, harmony-singing and instrumental chops of her musical partner – Rawlings has gone on to become one of the giants of the Americana scene.

For his third solo album, *Poor David's Almanack*, Rawlings has looked to archetypal folk and Americana songs for inspiration; absorbing them and creating something unique. Half of the album was written alone without longtime writing partner Welch – a first for Rawlings – and many songs have already become staples of his live show.

While recording the album to analog tape at Woodland Studios, East Nashville, Rawlings experimented with overdubs and other layered effects. Assisting him were a pair of top-shelf engineers: longtime collaborator Matt Andrews and legendary studio hand Ken Scott, whose work can be heard on landmark albums by the Beatles, David Bowie, and Elton John.

Influenced by new experiences, old sounds and classic books – including Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*, whose title serves as the basis for Rawlings' own album – *Poor David's Almanack* nods to its source material without borrowing.

A leader of the contemporary folk revival, Rawlings began releasing albums with Welch in the mid-90s, championing acoustic music in the grunge era. For more than two decades since, he has juggled multiple roles as a frontman, duo partner, sideman and behind-the-scenes producer.

Where are you now and what are you up to?

I'm in Albany, New York. We played a show here last night at The Egg.

The new record is out now. What can we expect from the third?

Well, on the last record, we had written a batch of songs that had a certain amount of weight to them, with expansive forms. A number of them 'The Weekend', 'Short Haired Woman Blues' and 'The Pilgrim' had an almost modern song form; verse, pre-chorus, then chorus. I don't know why we were writing like that, but that's what our minds were playing around with. So a lot of these songs got stretched out, and it colored the way they were arranged and performed. They were a great addition to the live show and it was interesting to take those longer journeys with people.

Over the course of a show, though, I felt like it was hard as a performer and I kept feeling like I wanted to intersperse simpler folk songs. Sometimes we would throw in a cover or something from an earlier record. After a break in the Nashville Obsolete touring last summer, I started, quite inadvertently, to write these songs. By the fall, I had six or seven written so I put them in the show and they went down really well. I began a bunch of those shows with 'Midnight Train'.

You're now under the name David Rawlings, rather than David Rawlings Machine. What was the decision behind that?

It was simplicity more than anything else. We'd come up with the Machine name a few years ago, but it just felt like it was time to write some of the songs by myself. It felt like more of a classic name to play under. When we first started out doing the Machine, I wasn't as confident having my name on an album cover.

But now, I thought it's ok – it's not going to confuse anyone [laughs].

The record has been crafted on analog tape. What would you say are the advantages of using tape, rather than digital?
From the very first recordings we made, which were produced by T Bone Burnett, we've always recorded on tape – it's the way I learned to make records. Shortly after we made our first record, Gillian and I bought a tape machine and started accumulating a studio over time. I think the first record I produced for us was *Time (The Revelator)*. The truth is, I never saw much advantage of moving into the digital world for the music we record. Maybe if you want to loop or have an unlimited number of tracks, maybe. But those things don't really suit us or give us very much. By nature, digital recording is a lower quality recording because you have to go through a converter which changes everything from analog to digital and that conversion is very different to the conversion you get when you take an electrical signal and turn it to a magnetic signal on tape. Tape is a different medium to us. It's the medium that I know how to work on and love the sound of. People make wonderful records on digital audio and I hesitate to criticise it, but it's not for what we do.

When we were first recording at the house, we were on the flight path at Nashville airport, in this little tiny cabin with a tiny two-track. We could start recording at midnight when the last plane stopped flying and we could work until 5.30am when they started flying again. So for a long time, when Gillian and I were working on things in the late 90s, we were completely nocturnal. That's just how we had to be [laughs].

You've been touring the States a lot recently. Any plans to visit the UK ?
We are planning on coming over soon but I'm not sure when, next summer or late Spring is likely. Nothing's firm, but I know there are conversations being had and it's been a while since we've been over.

I have to say I always love playing in the UK – it's always been one of our favourite places to tour. The audiences are always fantastic. The people who come to the shows tend to be so knowledgeable about the music I love, we all love, which elevates the shows. In different parts of the States you have very different audiences and you can tailor shows a little bit. If you're in the South East, for instance, you'll get people more familiar with the bluegrass side of things. But people into folk music – or the American version of folk music – really have a great knowledge and understanding of it. Which is great.

GEARBOX

On this record I didn't play my 1935 Epiphone Olympic much. I only played a solo on 'Cumberland Gap'. On this record I played a 1956 D'Angelico Excel, which was rather new to me and I liked playing a different guitar. It had a larger body with a little more fullness. Gillian played a 1960 Gibson Hummingbird that was strung Nashville style. We may bring these guitars on the road too. I've done my entire career with a 1935 Epiphone – I don't understand why you'd spend your life playing a guitar that didn't sound as good because you didn't want to bring your vintage guitar on the road. Generally, though, for the live shows, Willie Watson plays Larrivée guitar and banjo, Gillian plays a Gibson J-50 and I play my little 1935 Epiphone and a bit of banjo as well.

> "Truth is, I never saw much advantage in moving into the digital world"

You've written songs with Ryan Adams in the past. What was it like working with him?
Well, I guess I met Ryan on a Gram Parsons tribute in New York that we both did. We hit it off fairly well that night. I remember we banged around on a piano, sang some songs, and drank some whiskey, it was a great time. Shortly thereafter he moved to Nashville and we would get together at the little house that planes flew over and I've got loads of tapes of us jamming there in the back room. Ryan's a guy who has boundless energy and is always incredibly excited about the music he's making. We've worked on lots of songs.

How did you first get into playing the guitar?
I remember being 16 and going for a pizza with a very good friend of mine in the middle of the winter – really snowing hard. As we walked home, he said "you should see if you can get your parents to get you an acoustic guitar for Christmas". He said, "I'm going to get my parents to buy me a harmonica and we'll play 'Heart of Gold' at the talent show", so, lo and behold, my parents managed to spend $30 on this very cheap little acoustic guitar and as soon as I got it, and worked through the tuition book in a couple of days, I immediately knew I had the facility for it. I met a kid who lived just across the highway whose dad taught guitar. Within the week I became friends with him and he taught me 'Heart of Gold'. His father had actually stopped teaching, but I kept asking him, and eventually he said he would teach me but I would have to practice hard. There was this understanding that if I didn't put in the work, he would stop. He was a great teacher.

Tell me about your songwriting process...
Over the years, we have written songs every way you can imagine. This batch, I was trying to find little pieces of traditional songs and to adapt and make my own. I looked for melodies, chords and systems that were simple but strong. I played them, absorbed them and made them into my own thing. I tried to find melodies and adapt them or find form and add to them in the folk tradition.

It happens to every writer – you write a song and three years later realise it's melodically based off this other song. You didn't know it at the time, but the musical part of you just does it instinctively. That's the point of this evolving, ever-changing, ever-alive thing that we call folk music. ■

***Poor David's Almanack* is out now.**
Info: www.davidrawlingsmusic.com

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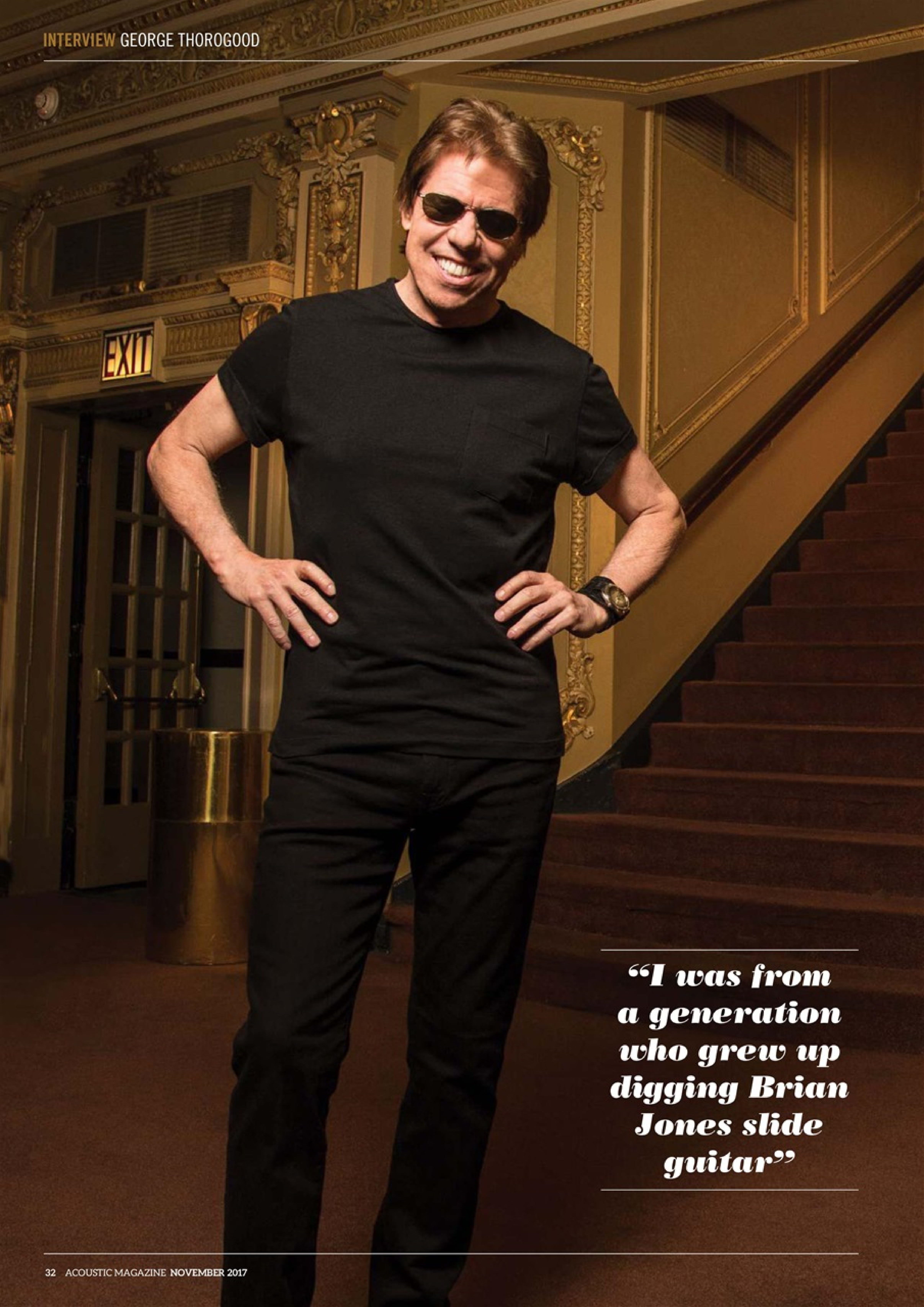


"I was from a generation who grew up digging Brian Jones slide guitar"

GEORGE THOROGOOD

The erstwhile Destroyer has ditched his electrics and picked up his acoustic, but as his biggest hit says, it's business as usual. Julian Piper found out more…

How did I look? Did I look handsome, an international celebrity?" I've just related to George Thorogood how I caught him on his first British television appearance. "You sounded great," I reply. "No – how did I look?" he snorts. "Well, I don't think I noticed. I was probably watching your drummer and bass player," I quip. He groans. It's a bizarre end to our conversation. After all, George Thorogood is probably the last guy you'd expect to care about such stuff. But then he's always been a joker. One year he played 51 States in 50 days.

Thorogood and his band the Destroyers, blew in from Delaware on the tail end of punk rock in the late 70s, sandwiched between the overblown pomp rock of bands like ELP, and the upcoming era of big hair and padded shoulders. For lovers of unexpurgated music, his rafter-raising, no frills R'n'B was a much needed shot in the arm, a visceral postscript to the fast fading anarchy of punk.

Playing a semi acoustic Gibson ES-125, Thorogood hammered out crude versions of obscure Chicago gems by Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry, against which even the white boy blues of the Rolling Stones early albums, came over like songs for nursing mothers.

Which is why the very idea of George Thorogood recording an acoustic album is a weird one. But there again, maybe not…

"When I first started out I was trying to get my career going as a solo artist," he pointed out. "I loved what John Hammond was doing, and although I was doing OK, I wasn't really going anywhere with that. People around me said that I should go electric, get a band, and then when I saw Hound Dog Taylor, it felt more natural to me. But I always loved playing acoustically, and had the idea of an acoustic album in the back of my mind. Here it is now on Rounder Records, right back where I started out."

In the 60s Howling Wolf made a television appearance with the Rolling Stones on the television show *Shindig*, which he apparently saw. How influential was that?

"Well I'm sure the whole world saw that, but I'd been listening to rock'n'roll since Elvis Presley started out, when I was a real little child; the music of people like the Everly Brothers and Fats Domino was around me ever since I could remember. I was like everyone else. I grew up a middle child, in a middle class family in the middle of nowhere. But the whole world was turned on by the Stones and the Beatles, and everyone wanted to be involved in music in some way, shape or form. Unlike others who wanted just to grow their hair and pick up a guitar, I was fascinated by the whole background to what they were doing. They represented freedom.

"The Stones were constantly referring to American R'n'B artists like Bo Diddley, Muddy Waters and so on, as were the Yardbirds and Cream; I realised they were all coming from this American blues music, and that's what got me started on playing guitar. I was from a generation that grew up digging Brian Jones slide guitar, and Keith Richards playing Chuck Berry. I never imagined I was going to come up with something like 'Mr Tambourine Man' or 'Yesterday', but I thought 'If this is what Elvin Bishop and Michael Bloomfield are listening to, then I'm going to go to school too, maybe I can get rolling with this blues thing.'" He laughs.

Busking and playing in bars for tips, Thorogood became friends with blues legends Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, a duo who, oddly, were known to only ever meet up onstage. How were they to work with?

"Their relationship was a little strained at that point but they knew they had an act, so they had to stay together. Both of them were very friendly with me during the short period of time I worked with them, and very encouraging. I also roadied for Hound Dog Taylor for a week or so, and I liked the way he used two guitars and drums, no bass. When the Destroyers started out, that's how it was with us too."

Their first album was all covers, but had some unusual songs on it like 'Move It On Over' by Hank Williams, and Bo Diddley's 'Ride On Josephine', songs we soon heard you playing. "It was pretty much our live set that we'd been playing for about two years on the road. I started putting together material as far back as 1971/72, but at that time most of the best songs had been pretty well picked over by people like the Stones, and Charlie Musselwhite. There wasn't much left.

"I made it over to England of all places, and there I found imports from America by Jimmy Reed and Elmore James, records I couldn't get in the US, where they brought out hit compilations."

In 1981 Thorogood toured with the Rolling Stones. Playing stadiums must have been a big change from playing Delaware bars, I suggest.

"Are you trying to say we were just a bar band, not a stadium act?" he retorts. "I never get used to that moment when I walk on the stage; it doesn't matter where you're playing, all music is intimate stuff. And if you're playing a bigger venue, then you just hire a bigger amp. With the Stones tour we had a captive audience each night, people who'd been hanging around for five hours!' he laughs.

To date, Thorogood has moved 15 million albums. Not bad for a bar band from Delaware, and true to form, while *Party Of One* is acoustic, it's the usual eclectic mix of Thorogood songs: Bob Dylan's 'Down The Highway', Hank Williams' 'Pictures From Life's Other Side', alongside songs from way back in his career like 'One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer'.

"They were just natural choices," he says. "Songs I used to play when I went out and did my solo stuff. I played a bunch of guitars, but the main acoustics were a Gibson J-200, a Gibson Dove and a Dobro 33C. Most of the songs are in open D or open G tuning, because tuning down gives a much thicker sound, and it's easier for my voice. I had to kind of reverse my hands and my head to do the thing justice, but this record is what I was, what I am and always will be." ■

George Thorogood's album *Party Of One* is out now on Rounder Records. Info: www.georgethorogood.com

OFFA REX

The latest album from US band The Decemberists, under project name 'Offa Rex', may well pique British musicologists' interest. Kate Puttick spoke to frontman Colin Meloy and collaborator Olivia Chaney to find out more...

When US cult-favourites The Decemberists announced an album of British psych-folk inspired 'standards', as interpreted and arranged by critically-acclaimed new UK artist Olivia Chaney, under the name 'Offa Rex', *Acoustic* saw rich pickings in terms of potential questions. Given Chaney's classical training and the Decemberists' now-decades-long experience as a group, the positive reviews were unsurprising. With carefully-selected instrumentation designed to mirror the feel of 1970s folk revival records – but with the cornier sounds turned down a notch – *The Queen of Hearts* is a fascinating, at times jaw-droppingly beautiful set of songs, with more than a few hidden twists and turns...

How would you describe the spirit of *Queen of Hearts*?
Meloy: I heard Olivia's record and was really taken by the arrangements and some of the traditional folk music on it, and felt she had such a unique voice and arrangement style. Greedily, I was desperate to hear her do 'Willy O' Winsbury' – and tweeted her as such! She kindly responded. We went on tour together, and while 'Willie O' Winsbury' never came together at that time, I think she politely demurred over it, and eventually I suggested that we just make a record together... hoping 'Willie O' Winsbury' would find its way onto that. That's probably the shortest version!

You said the project was as much about making ancient discoveries as it was about psych-folk. Were you successful?
Chaney: I think Colin and I have different relationships with the subject matter culturally – me being mongrel-British and him being American. And also, him being a superstar and me being someone whose debut hardly anyone's listened to! I ended up writing an epic list of probably quite obscure stuff. Not to speak for Colin, but he was good at reminding me that not everybody had heard some of these.
Meloy: 'The Gardener' hasn't been interpreted often, as well as 'To Make You Stay'. It was an interesting process because to my ear, not being completely immersed in the folk scene, the British Folk Revival is very much a fringe thing. To me 'Bonnie May', with its nod to the 60s interpreters, is in some ways shining a light. Whereas Olivia said, 'Well, plenty of light has been shone on that!' So it depends on what corner of the world you live in! In America, they'll be like 'Willie O' What?' In English folk clubs, though, this may well be an album of standards!

Olivia, you did quite a lot the arrangements. What boxes did you hope to tick?
I felt very conscious that I needed to be mindful of all of the personalities of the Decemberists! And having hung out with them and got to know them as musicians I thought, 'How are we going to bring together all of their different influences? As well as mine!' It was a wonderfully organic process. It's that classic thing of when you don't go in knowing what you're doing it goes well, and then it all reverses for the one you thought you did know!

There was a lot of that. I flew over with a lot of stuff under my arms. 'Willie O Winsbury' was the big one for that. I sent over loads of little demos that I kind of knew weren't working – i.e. Colin would just politely not respond! Then one night I stayed up one night and finally thought 'This is it!' Not everyone in the band joins in on that one, but I think that's the magical thing about the Decemberists – differently shaped ensembles each time.

The Decemberists is quite an established band. Was that intimidating as a solo artist?
Well, I left this stuff until quite late in my career. But in a way that works quite well for me, as there's certain stuff I don't give a toss about. I'm in my mid-30s but I'm happily signed to a good label. I'm happy to still try and get things right. So it was daunting but Colin and I often agreed to disagree about stuff. And I'm in reverence of them and their experiences.

© Shervin Lainez

L-R: Colin Meloy, John Moen, Olivia Chaney, Jenny Conlee, Nate Query, Chris Funk

Did you explore any new instruments?
Chaney: Recorder?
Meloy: Oh no, we're no stranger to the recorder ensemble! [laughs] But really, yes, we did more or less know what kind of sound palette we'd go in with. The band lends a lot to the arrangement. My bandmates are great 'joiners'. They're very thoughtful when adding their own parts. As far as new sounds, I played a little electric guitar and rhythm guitar without singing – a new thing for me!
Chaney: What?
Meloy: Yeah, playing rhythm guitar... which in a way has put me in better stead with my band because I now know a bit more what it is to be a supporting player! That was an interesting aspect of the project for me.
Chaney: He's such a great guitarist. That's really interesting, because from having seen a lot of their shows, I guess I did get to hear you play in a different way.

What kind of emotional attachment do you have to your gear?
Meloy: All of the acoustic parts were done on a 1977 Fylde which I thought was only appropriate. I actually have a newer Fylde that they made for me. I got it on permanent loan and I'm supposed to come up with something to trade it for but I haven't actually found anything comparable... And Olivia has quite an incredible Dobro which she should talk about.
Chaney: I feel like a charlatan on the guitar.
Meloy: What are you talking about?!
Chaney: I do weird tunings and put the capo in weird places.
Meloy: Well you don't know the keys and all that, but that doesn't matter.
Chaney: I'm such a weird mix. I'm classically trained, and on the piano I know what I'm doing, but a lot of it is winging it. But anyway,

> **"When I play the Dobro, it's like when you walk a dog that's really walking you"**

I've got this wonderful Dobro that's completely untameable, like when you walk a dog that's really walking you. Sometimes I don't know what I'm doing with it.

How did you come across it?
Chaney: It's kind of an intimate story. Someone I was co-writing and working with was trying to encourage me to develop a different sound. Ironically none of it ever came to anything but I did keep the guitar! Weirdly, my Indian harmonium was also bought for me by a lovely ex. When I sing with it, it's a very physical thing, because I have to pump the bellows. It's like it's breathing with me. But I resent my love of that thing, it weighs 20 kilos and when I take it on a gig, or on a plane, I think 'Why the fuck am I bringing it with me?' But everytime I start playing with it onstage, I think 'That's why I bust my guts bringing it!' I just wish it was lighter. And then there's my harpsichord...

Are you going to tour the UK as Offa Rex?
Meloy: We would love to but for the expense and logistics, as unromantic as that sounds! I wish someone had a better story, fear of flying or something, like Kate Bush. The Decemberists are going back into the studio in the fall, so touring within proximity of the album is not something that's going to happen.
Chaney: It feels like there's people rooting for it in the UK. But the Decemberists are not a small outfit so these things take a bit of work. ■

***Queen of Hearts* is out now.**
Info: www.decemberists.com/news/offa-rex

YUSUF

When the usually reticent Yusuf/Cat Stevens played an ultra-exclusive gig in London to mark his new album, Acoustic jumped at the chance. Read a snapshot of the Q&A here

WORDS: ANDY PRITCHARD **Q&A:** CERYS MATHEWS

Sometimes I love my job. When *Acoustic*'s esteemed editor invited me to cover an album launch event for Yusuf Islam (formerly known as Cat Stevens), I nearly bit his hand off. Ten years my senior, Islam's work really did form the soundtrack of my formative years, passing the 'Blimey, did he write that as well?' test with ease. Shuffle through his songbook and you find some of the greatest work of his generation: 'Moonshadow', 'Father and Son', 'Peace Train' and 'First Cut Is The Deepest' to name but a few. This album features some new material and some old songs reinterpreted.

The location on the invite said 'Joseph Fine Art Gallery, New Oxford Street' – a clean shirt was definitely in order. It was only after heading through those doors, though, that I realised just how significant an event this was going to be. On arrival there was the normal bevvy of bright young music industry types along with a liberal smattering of, shall we say, more musically experienced people. The gallery owner informed me that where we were standing had actually once been Yusuf's parent's restaurant. So here we were, 50 years on from the release of his first album *Matthew and Son*, in the very place he lived and grew up. We'll let broadcaster and musician Cerys Matthews, who conducted the subsequent Q&A, pick up the story...

CM: So Yusuf how do you feel returning to the family home?

Yusuf: I miss Mum and Dad but time moves on. This is where I grew up. It was Mum's brilliant idea. Dad had been to America and picked up on the milk bar thing and this is where it all began. My first job was here, as a waiter. Of course, we were also right at the centre of the musical universe that was London then. Tin Pan Alley was just down the road, we had Dick James' Northern Songs just a few doors down and Andrew Loog Oldham and his Immediate Records two doors further on. So that was the world I grew up in.

CM: As we can see from your album art, you are a keen artist [Islam has produced a different piece for each track]. Did you first want to be an artist or a songwriter?

Yusuf: First I wanted to become an artist, so that's why you see all around you this return to my original forte if you like, but then I realised that a lot of artists die poor... [laughter]. I set out my stall outside the National Gallery and I used to draw peoples' portraits but it just didn't make me rich. So I looked around and then of course the Beatles arrived and everything became possible. I got a guitar and started translating my talents into musical form.

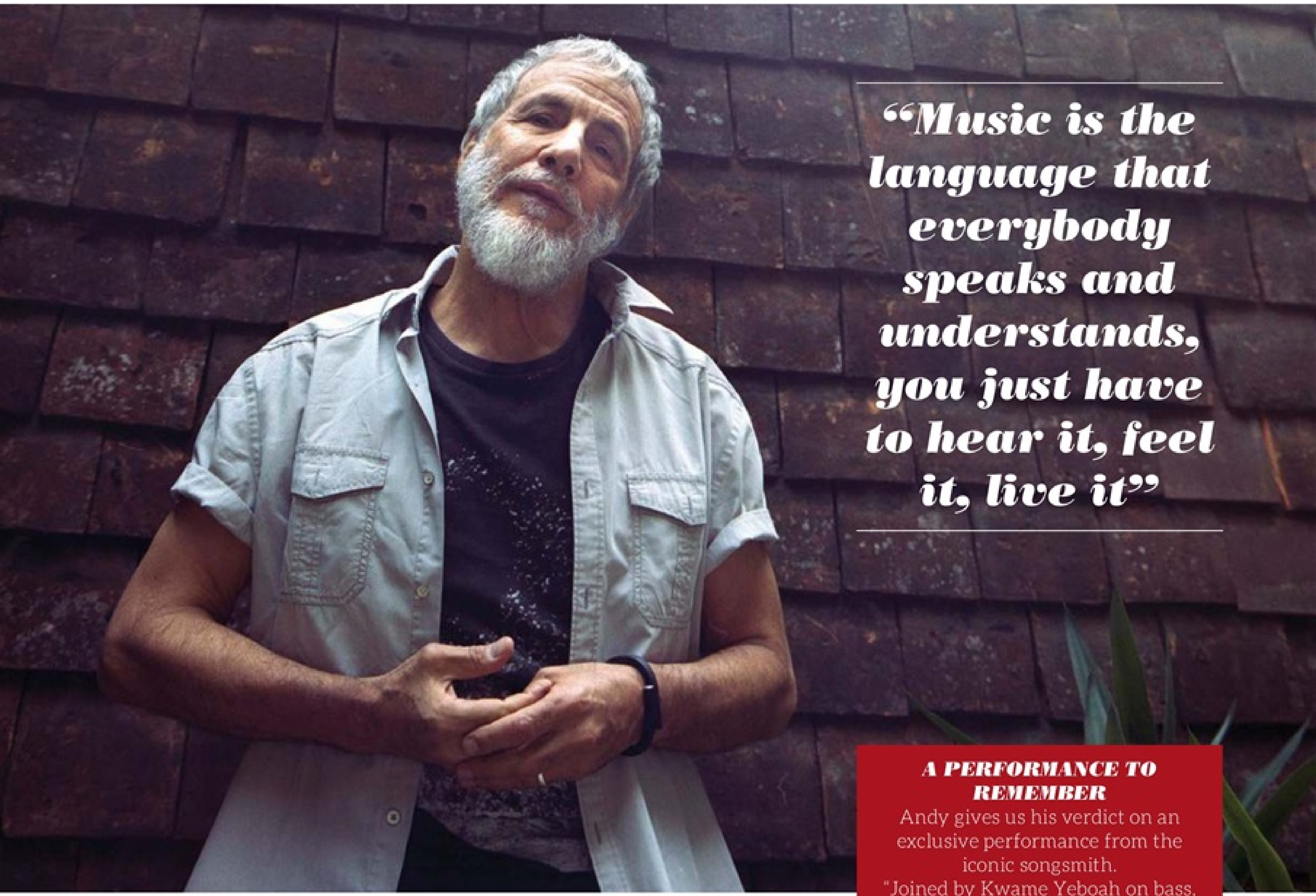
CM: *The Laughing Apple* feels to me like you now have the perspective of a village elder with all the wisdom that comes with the decades passing. Is that how it felt to you, putting it together?

Yusuf: Well, you look back at your childhood with fondness: the greater the distance, the sweeter it becomes. There is a great saying, actually by TS Eliot, which describes what is happening. He said "We shall not cease our exploration until we reach the place where we first started and know it for the first time." Which I thought was brilliant.

CM: Is that the secret to your songwriting then, never losing the wonder that you feel as a youngster?

Yusuf: Yeah I think so and that kind of shows itself in my art too. This art is actually called naïve, a Yugoslavian style of painting and drawing. I don't think I've changed in my attitude towards being excited about looking

Gibson



> **"Music is the language that everybody speaks and understands, you just have to hear it, feel it, live it"**

at things and life, and seeing possibilities, so coming back to some of those early songs again was fantastic. I thought, 'Wow I wrote that,' and I started reinterpreting them again; and this time, of course, through the filter of all the years that had gone by in between, it was like a breeze.

CM: It is like a circle of life isn't it? Revisiting some of your earlier songs some of which, in the early productions, didn't sound how you wanted them to sound?

Yusuf: In the early days I didn't know what production was all about, so I left all that up to the producer Mike Hurst and he was a big fan of *Pet Sounds* [Beach Boys]. I think he was experimenting with me, trying to create a massive sound so we had lots of instruments and brass and violins. The studio was full of all these musicians when I went in with my little song and so in a way, what we've done now is go back to the roots of those songs and revisited how I meant it to be, in a much more personal way.

CM: You had a lot of fun in the studio by the sound of it!

Yusuf: We joined up again with Alun Davies (guitars) and Paul Samwell-Smith (producer) and had just a great time, a breakout of what felt natural and instinctive. We didn't have to work very hard to be honest. [Alun Davies and Paul Samwell-Smith had both worked on *Tea for the Tillerman* in 1970 and *Teaser and the Firecat* in 1971, both of which went triple platinum in the US.]

CM: As a huge admirer of your songwriting I have to ask you, you very famously walked away from the music industry and had a break of some 28 years. I've always wondered what made you come back into this fray. Were the songs still coming to you over that time?

Yusuf: Everything has an intention, a motivation, and coming back, my motivation is to communicate to build bridges because music is the language that everybody speaks and understands, you just have to hear it, feel it, live it. ■

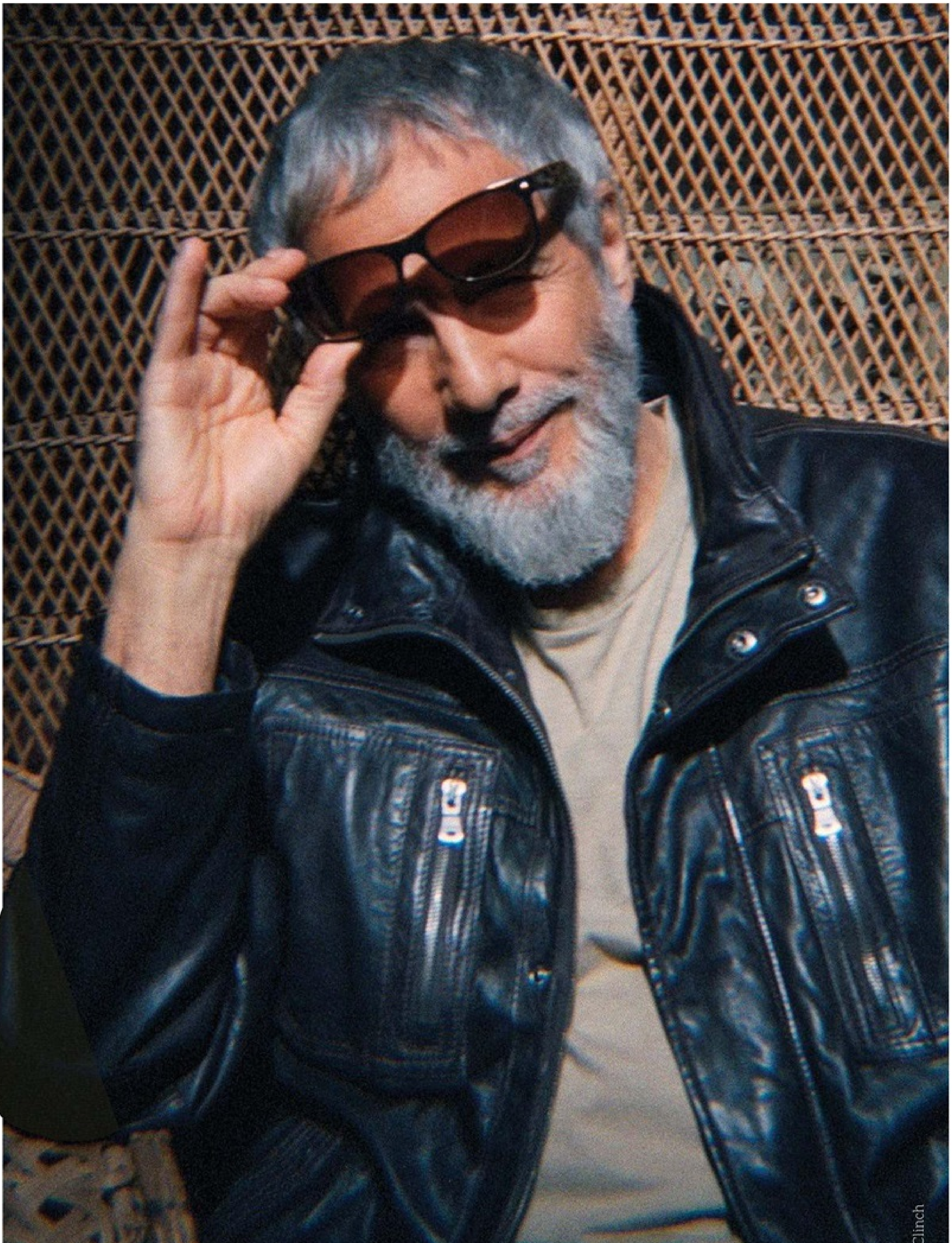
Yusuf's new album *The Laughing Apple* is out now.
Info: www.catstevens.com

A PERFORMANCE TO REMEMBER

Andy gives us his verdict on an exclusive performance from the iconic songsmith.

"Joined by Kwame Yeboah on bass, harmonies and even a cajon pedal (a very able muso indeed), the two played a short intimate set: two songs from the album, 'Blackness of the Night' and 'See What Love Did to Me', followed by a fun take on 'Here Comes My Baby', one of his tunes first made famous by The Tremeloes. Clearly a very comfortable and instinctive performer. I can only say that the audiences on his upcoming tour of South Africa, Australia and New Zealand are in for a real treat. Most musicians of his generation have lost something over the years but this is definitely not the case here. Both in performance and on the new album, he continues to effortlessly weave strands of folk, pop and narrative into three minute stories that touch the heart.

"In conversation with him afterwards, we talked about his guitar, a well-travelled natural Gibson J-200 and the fact that I'd seen him playing the same model albeit in a different finish in videos from the 70s. 'Ah the black one,' he said. 'I've had to retire that one.' Obviously a faithful man in more ways than one."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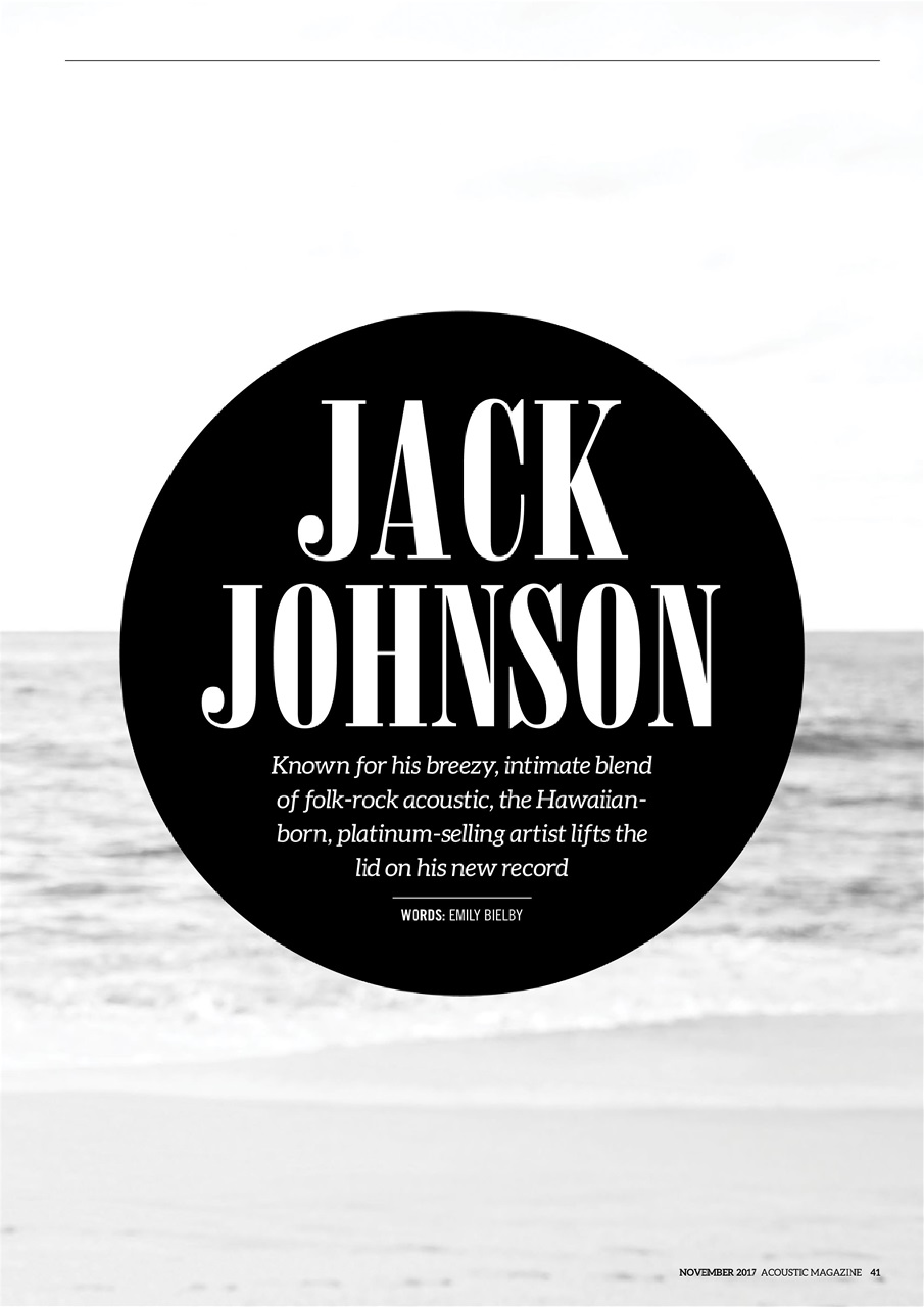

JACK JOHNSON

Known for his breezy, intimate blend of folk-rock acoustic, the Hawaiian-born, platinum-selling artist lifts the lid on his new record

WORDS: EMILY BIELBY

Growing up on the North Shore of Oahu, Hawaii, it's hardly surprising that Jack Johnson spent a lot of his time surfing. If he wasn't surfing, he'd be filming people who were, but it wasn't long before music entered the beach lover's life.

After selling more than 14 million albums worldwide and headlining festivals such as Coachella, Bonnaroo and Outside Lands, it seems the surfer transformed into a music sensation pretty fast, but still today remains devoted to life on the waves.

Aged 14, Johnson used his dad's best mate's guitar to get his musical route started, initially performing at beach barbecues. "My dad's friend was visiting and it was really sweet because he could tell how excited I was about learning my first chords on the acoustic guitar. He actually left the guitar at my dad's house because he knew he was going to be coming back in about half a year and he had another one at home," enthuses Jack. "So he left me this guitar and I didn't realise how lucky I was at the time – it was an old Martin, a vintage model from the 1940s. It was a small, dark wood guitar and it was beautiful. I didn't appreciate it back then, but it was an amazing guitar with a great action, which made it really easy to learn my first chords on.

"I'm not too much of snob when it comes to guitars"

"I had that guitar for about six months and then he came back and, as I'd been practicing a lot, he showed me a few more chords. But then he had to take the guitar home. So for the next couple of years I was just borrowing guitars, until my mum and dad got me a Guild guitar for my 16th birthday. I learnt chords from my dad's friend and from my best friend, who was also learning guitar. As my friend was a few months ahead of me, he would show me some chords and it all went from there."

Johnson, who played in a punk band called Limber Chicken during high school, grew up a fan of post-hardcore punk, listening to bands such as Minor Threat and Fugazi. But he was also really into softer offerings in the form of The Beatles and Cat Stevens. Was it difficult learning two totally different styles at the same time? "I would use a lot of

GEARBOX
ACOUSTIC COLLECTION

"I have a Gibson J-45 that I bought in New York and a Gibson Hummingbird that I picked up at a shop in Japan one time and then I've got a nice Martin, which is one of the D models. I have a lot of these Cole Clark guitars from Australia that I tour with live, a Cole Clark FL1 and a Cole Clark FL2. They have a really nice sound; I'll use them in the studio as well. The Cole Clarks are nice because I play in a lot of Hawaiian tunings and so it's good to have a balanced sound and my sound guy knows that when I switch between the guitars they'll be similar but I can have different tunings so I have a lot of those Cole Clarks that I bring on the road with me. I have my Pepe Romero and some ukuleles that he's built for me as well so any ukulele sound you hear on the record, that's my Pepe Romero ukulele."

STRINGS

"I use D'Addario strings and always have. I don't change my strings too much unless they start getting rusty. There's this running joke between my sound guy and I that he changes them more often than I think they need doing. I'll notice once they've been changed as well because they go out of tune quicker."

tablature books and things like that because I was learning electric and acoustic at the same time. I was really into punk rock but at the same time I was learning all these folk songs as well," says Johnson. "I enjoyed playing both of them but I think the hardest things were the chords on the acoustic at the very beginning because I was learning all these power chords at the same time so I could play punk rock stuff easier. I think at the very beginning stages of learning guitar, the hardest part is when your muscles go really quickly. "I liked Jimi Hendrix a lot so even though I was playing a lot of acoustic, I was learning a lot with my pinkie how to do hammer-ons like on a barre chord and all those kinds of things, too" he says.

Learning an instrument is great, but learning a different style on an instrument is even greater. With the multiple YouTube tutorials available, Johnson has been eager to pick up a few new things – even as an adult and global superstar musician. "I'm trying to learn some classical because I've got these neat nylon guitars and that's really nice sounding when you're just sitting alone. It's great exercise to play and learn. I like blues stuff and slide. I like trying all different styles and I would say that the blues where you're doing a certain pattern with your thumb to keep the bass going and then being able to slide up and do embellishments with the other fingers, I like all those intricate things."

Guitar wise, Johnson's live setup consists mainly of Cole Clark guitars. He offers some advice on how he's able to create that almost direct acoustic sound without the feedback. "I use the Cole Clarks because they have a nice acoustic sound but they also have really nice pickup systems in them that help. That's the trick for us acoustic guitar players: how do you play in a live setting, especially if you have drums? You can't just make it but you want to get that sound.

"I also run it through an amp as well and my sound guy will help mic the amp too. Most of the guitars in my studio don't make it on the road because I live in Hawaii and they stay there but there's an electro-acoustic one that I'm traveling with today that's a hollow body. I mostly only play hollow body electrics – I met Taj Mahal one time, and he was the one who converted me to that because I was just starting to play with electrics a little more. He admitted that he only liked playing the hollowbody electrics because at least then it still has an acoustic resonant that you can feel against your stomach when you play. That really made sense to me, so even with my electrics they're acoustic to some degree. The new record has a hollow body electric that I play without really amping it; it's mostly just the sound of the microphone in front of the guitar," admits Johnson.

The salt air in Hawaii means that Johnson's guitar collection is somewhat limited and kept fairly simple, it's not filled with fancy, nice guitars, but then again, he's not fussy when it comes to brands and will play just about anything he is handed. "If I'm going to do some fingerpicking then I like to play my Gibson and then if I'm strumming I'll like the Martin a little more. They have certain sounds to them and the action has a lot to it as well, like just the way it feels to do some fingerpicking or certain chords. So I have guitars that I'll go to for certain things. I'm not too much of snob when it comes to guitars. If I have to play at a radio show and don't have a guitar and they just have any old thing lying around, I like seeing how that will sound," he clarifies. "I don't really mind too much but I do enjoy

playing really nice guitars, you can really feel the difference when you have one that's set up beautifully and it resonates in a certain way. I do prefer the smaller style of guitar, though, like the parlors but part of that is function; I love playing guitar when I'm traveling.

"I used to make surf films, bringing all my camera equipment with me, and so it was a luxury to bring a guitar. It had to be small enough to fit into the bunk of a boat. Ukuleles are already small so I like the bigger baritone ukuleles – but still small enough that you can stick it into a backpack, I like that. To me it's a lot about where I'm at – i.e. if I'm camping or on boats – so by that fact I ended up liking the sound of smaller guitars better."

For the singer-songwriter's first new album in five years, *All The Light Above It Too*, Johnson used his Gibson Hummingbird, Gibson J-45 and a Martin D model for the majority of the guitar work.

What about lyrical themes? "The first four songs on the record are about politics in America during the last few months and sort of everything from all the talk of fake news to somebody running our country who's making a lot of decisions that I don't agree with. The first song on the record sets up the rest of the record, it's about thoughts that could be running through your mind, making things confusing. Sometimes I just need to get stuff off my mind.

"So yeah the topics kind of range, it might be a love song, or political commentary, it just depends but there is everything in between those two. Everything that comes up in life inspires me; it could be reading a book, a conversation with my brother or friends, or it could be trying to make my wife laugh. Anything in day-to-day life," admits Johnson.

Johnson is quite possibly the world's most laid back rock star, perhaps it's the Hawaiian air. With that in mind, it's no surprise to learn that his songwriting style shares the same approach. "My songwriting process changes around a little bit but, in general, I would say one line will come to me, maybe a few lines at a time, and it's just how I catalogue things in my brain by rhyming. It's how I keep track of phone numbers or little things I see in the day. It seems that everything goes into a rhyme in my mind and I go from there," he says.

"I have one acoustic around the house that I write a lot on; it's a nylon-string by Pepe Romero, who's a friend of mine in San Diego. That's my main one. In Hawaii, guitars get ruined pretty quick because of the humidity so I try and keep all my guitars in my studio, which is a little more sealed up. I'll bring one or two down to my house. I've got this nylon string which I've had around for a few years and it's a really beautiful guitar. I'll write on that one a lot because it's quiet, soft and easy on the fingers if I haven't been playing too much. Then I transfer them over and decide whether I want them to be on electric guitar or acoustic guitar, steel string or nylon string later. I switch around a little bit. There wasn't a whole lot of nylon on this album unlike my last album, which had probably more than half of it done using nylon."

In support of the record, Johnson is planning a tour of the southern US states, followed by a world tour, in early December. He hasn't quite figured out when he's coming over to the UK, but is hoping it'll be soon. ■

***All The Light Above It Too* is out now.**
Info: www. jackjohnsonmusic.com

PLAYER'S TIPS

1 ACOUSTIC PLAYERS WHO ARE JUST STARTING OUT

"What I've always liked about the acoustic guitar is that it's sort of like playing the drums. It's such a percussive instrument and I love the beauty of that. I hardly ever play the electric unless I'm with the band but with the acoustic you have a built-in drum set. Whenever I'm teaching kids or showing them how to play, I always start by letting them bang on it like a drum first so they can hear all those sounds that you can get out of it, muting the strings and making your hand go across the strings. It's almost like a shaker. Once you learn to be strong with your rhythm all the chord stuff can follow."

2 ACHIEVING A GOOD LIVE SOUND WITH AN ACOUSTIC

"Using a feedback buster helps but it just depends on whether you're going for an acoustic sound. If you're sitting down on a stool, the only one on the stage, I'll ask my friend who does sound to just give me the microphone – not even using the direct signal. I really like the way it sounds with just the microphone out in front of the guitar. But that's hard to do when you're playing different clubs and using in-house sound. When touring without a sound guy, often I'd just try and trust the person at that place. They know the room. But with my friend who tours with me, sometimes we'll just mic the acoustic guitar because I like the way it sounds with all of the fingers on the strings and all those different fret noises you can get. I like that natural sound. The reality is, we're a whole band with drums, piano and bass. The feedback buster helps avoid that feedback from happening live."

3 PLAYERS LOOKING TO DEVELOP THEIR ACOUSTIC SKILL SET

"Practice until your fingers start to get a little sore and then take a break, even for like an hour. Then when you come back, you feel stronger and soon that pain goes away. There's also the calluses and pain from the muscles but it's always so surprising how easily you get past it. Even now, when I learn a jazz chord, I'll look at my fingers and think, 'There's no way I can do that'. But if I just stick with it, it happens. So keep practicing and the muscle memory will become much stronger."

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AT THE CROSSROADS

After recovering from cancer, long-time player Alex Scott found himself at a crossroads – continue as a businessman or finally follow his musical dream? Alex imparted his story to Acoustic

For most of my life, I've been pulled in two directions: business or music. I've been a 'closet' musician for more than 30 years; frustrated and unfulfilled, at times, but always productive. Like many of us, real matters of life, business, economics, and family had to take priority over the desire to play and write music. Hardheaded decisions had to be taken at the expense of following my dream.

What business success did allow me to do, however, is to play and perform intermittently when it suited me. Indeed, over the years, I've written more than 200 songs and recorded eight albums – more than many professional artists. Not bad for a part-timer!

Now I'm at a crossroads. Having recently recovered from an aggressive cancer, I've decided to ditch the business career earlier than previously envisioned. The health issues have accelerated my ambition to get my music out to a wider audience – sooner rather than later. In business, you can largely set objectives and manage outcomes. Music is more unpredictable – there are no guarantees. I recognise the challenges ahead and realise the music industry has changed beyond all recognition through the years.

In an attempt to try and make sense of it all, I attended an international songwriting convention earlier this year, the Belfast Nashville Songwriters Festival. It seemed a good omen that the festival was taking place where I was born and raised.

Held over five days, the festival was a platform for singer-songwriters and performers to meet, play and share ideas and learn from industry experts. It included new artists, up-and-coming artists, as well as professional musicians from around the world. There were also industry workshops, which covered subjects such as copyright, PRS, studio and production, lyrical and melody structures, co-writing, earning a living, and publishing.

With a wide range of artists – of all ages – in attendance, it didn't seem like age was a barrier to success. During the convention, I took the opportunity to perform a couple of my own songs at the open mic events and joined in with some jams.

Having returned home, suitably inspired, I joined the Songwriters Academy to network with other aspirational songwriters and attended open mic nights. I also became a member of PRS, registered my recorded songs, and created a website to get my songs out to the world (alexscottmusic.co.uk).

The most negative element I've found so far is the way older musicians are perceived in a world geared towards youth. Younger audiences tend to dismiss of older musicians, unless they have a 'superstar' status.

Fortunately older music fans appreciate live musicians and performers who can play their instruments well – whatever their age. One key advantage of the digital age, however, is that older musicians can compete on a level playing field for the content and quality of their music – not how they look or dress.

At present, I'm rehearsing a completely new set of original songs, before heading on tour in the new year with a new album, which I'll be recording in Belfast soon.

Jethro Tull once said "too old to rock n' roll, too young to die". This no longer appears to be the case. Age shouldn't be a barrier to play music – it is for everybody to enjoy. Who knows where this road will end, but it's great to finally be walking it. Watch this space! ■

GEARBOX

Scott is an avid collector, and has acquired a range of instruments through the years, including a Martin D-45, Taylor 114e and an Avalon 'Ard Ri' series guitar. The Avalon is his instrument of choice, as it "plays superbly, and the richness of the sound is outstanding".

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INSIDE COLLECTION
PAUL BRETT

It's history time again! This month things get a little Da Vinci Code-esque, as Paul follows the trail of a mysterious Theorbo with biblical inscriptions…

When I first started collecting guitars back in the 60s the rarity and value lay way back in the 18th and 19th centuries, among the classical and flamenco acoustics. While still commanding a very healthy interest and price in today's market, the emphasis has changed towards those guitars from the 20th century in both the acoustic and electric genres. My prime interest in collecting was initially driven by the need to preserve guitars throughout the historical timeline of the instruments' development and to record and film such instruments so that others may hear and enjoy their sounds and makers craft. As my collection grew over the years I also used some of these iconic instruments to inspire and create new designs of which I now have a selection available via Vintage Guitars Worldwide. During my search for rarities I have also acquired some historical pieces that were the forerunners of some instruments that are popular today.

EDWARD LIGHT HARP LUTE

Edward Light was an English luthier operating out of Foley Street in London during the early part of the 1800s. His dital harp/lute was the forerunner of the harp guitar as we know it today. It's a small instrument that has six strings on a fretted neck. Another, a harp-like pillar, supports diatonically-tuned bass strings to extend the range of the fretted strings. The pitch of the bass strings could be raised a semitone by finger-operated ring stops that work very much like pedals on a harp. It is a lovely-sounding instrument and important in the instrument's historical timeline. Like many artistic people of that era, Light spent some time in debtor's prison: running up large debts at that time was just not an option.
http://youtu.be/-UE8O3yx2jI

"As a collector I look for quirks that are unique to that instrument"

THEORBO

Eagle-eyed TV viewers may have noticed on the Liverpool Victoria Insurance Company adverts that an actor holds a weird looking bowl-backed, stringed beast with the same neck set up as the dital harp. It's called a Theorbo, with a six-string neck and bass string post. It was developed in Italy in the late 1500s due to demand for a greater bass range. As with all guitars and guitar styles, an applied technique is always useful to get the best out of a stringed instrument. I sourced a Theorbo recently that was made in the 1800s, possibly in Germany. I must admit, it was a thing of interest and beauty with its main feature being an attractive carved head on the bass headstock. As a collector I also look for unusual quirks in instruments that are unique to that instrument. On this Theorbo, my partner Michele noticed something attached to the back of the body internally (although she couldn't make out what it was) that seemed attached to the bowl. It was very difficult to see inside the instrument because of the affixed soundhole rosette that appeared to be glued in solidly. So, I poked a mini camera through the small slits of the soundhole motif and lo and behold, I saw what seemed to be biblical text and illustrations of bible passages in old German. There was also a note signed and dated 1676. I asked Clive Carroll's wife Lily Neill, one of the world's leading celtic harpists, if she knew old German text and she said her brother David was an expert in this field. He said: "It looks like a printed Lutheran bible from 1704. So it is German after all. The text is from somewhere around 1 Samuel 15:29. There are printed illustrations in the book (the ones in the Theorbo should be there.) One of the illustrated scraps refers to Psalm 33 and the other clearly depicts Moses."

I doubt the instrument was made when the note was written, but it remains a mystery nonetheless. For a short video illustrating the instrument and its sound, visit:

http://youtu.be/N5AxGgIvqr4

BURNS GB65

One of the UK's iconic luthiers, Jim Burns, is always a good name to add to any collection. Apart from his electrics, hugely popular in the 60s and played by Hank Marvin and Brian May, he also delved into electro acoustics. The first was a GB65 which is considered one of his rarest to source. I've owned one for a good number of years and I bought it originally to see if it actually fitted into the electro acoustic genre as its visual design didn't quite fit the bill.

It was only made for around a year plus and then was dumped by Baldwin after it fully acquired Burns. Single cutaway in design, this was officially marketed as a 'Controlled Resonance" design and semi acoustic body with two pickups and long scale neck. The sound is actually very good but doesn't really hit the spot as an electro acoustic by comparison to today's models. It does handle fingerstyle genres very well which surprised me. Jim never quite got the finance needed to launch his designs on a global scale which typifies the way UK banks and investment houses had no vision into the market potential for guitars – it hasn't changed much despite excellent sales figures year on year.

http://youtu.be/CsNhQ3zlD0c ■

LARRIVÉE P-02E

Despite fierce competition in the smaller-bodied guitar market, Andy Pritchard finds himself beguiled by this winsome Californian

Since Edward Christopher Sheeran MBE first sauntered across the stage with a weenie Martin in his hand the demand in these fair isles for small-bodied guitars has gone through the roof. I can almost hear the telephone call from Larrivée UK distributor, Sound Technology to the factory in California: "Yeah we need something small and cheap. Well OK, not cheap, but you know, not expensive. Well OK, but it's gotta be small." Hence the reintroduction over here of the P-02 range.

Larrivée, while not enjoying the same notoriety as say, Martin and Taylor, lives in that promised land of luthiers who have grown into larger concerns while maintaining their bespoke feel. What stands them apart is that their production is all still in North America and that they only use solid woods; standards from which many of their rivals have fallen, particularly at the value end of their ranges. Originally made in Jean Larrivée's native Canada, production now takes place in Oxnard, California, just off route 101, half way between Santa Monica and Santa Barbara. They do have the rather unique bragging rights of having one of their parlour guitars on the International Space Station. In fact, fellow Canadian, astronaut Chris Hadfield, can be seen playing it in a rendition of Space Oddity online, which has got to be pretty cool.

BUILD QUALITY

So, what have we got here? The Parlour and small bodied guitar market is a hotly contested one and so you need to make sure that, when making your purchase decision, you are comparing apples with apples. This is an all-solid wood guitar handcrafted in North America, in this case a Canadian sitka spruce top with African sapele back and sides. Many of its rivals in the sector will use laminates to varying degrees and will not have benefitted from the same handcrafting that Larrivée has built their name upon.

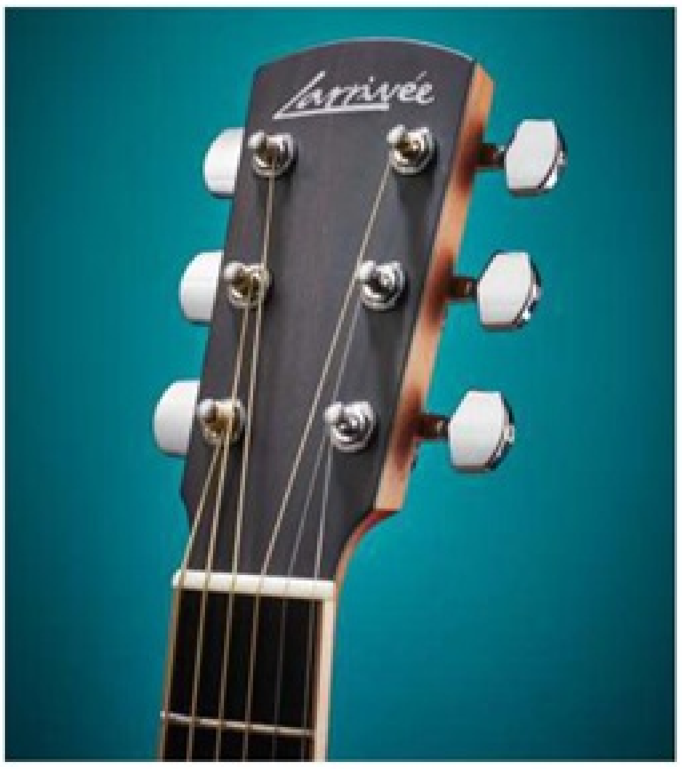
Coming in an attractive, solid, hard case bearing their logo, into which the guitar really does fit like a glove, first impressions are that this is a strikingly beautiful guitar. Larrivée's strapline is "affordable luxury" and everything about this little guitar drips quality. Also, as someone who hasn't dallied in the small end of things, I was struck by just how tiny it is. Leaning in its case against my other guitars it was a good six inches shorter.

So let's start at the top. The head is understated being capped with ebony and bearing the inlaid Larrivée legend. Tuners are 18:1 ratio carrying the Larrivée logo and just what you'd expect them to be, smooth and precise. The hand-fitted Dovetail one-piece neck is mahogany and, as with the rest of the guitar, is satin finished. Some satin finishes can just look flat but this is not the case here, giving the guitar a lovely organic feel in your hands. It joins the body at the 12th fret and is a very comfortable neck to play, but more of that later. The fretboard and bridge are both ebony, with microdot fret markers, and we have a TUSQ nut and saddle. Manufactured by Graphtech, their claim is that their product brings a consistency of density not possible with organic matter such as bone. Well, I can't speak for that but given the extremely well-balanced tone of this little beastie and the fact that Larrivée choose to use it one can only believe it to be so. Coming to the body, the Canadian Sitka spruce top is pale

"Larrivée's strapline is 'affordable luxury' and everything about this drips quality"

with a consistent grain. One of the brighter tonewoods, Jean Larrivée himself assures us on their website that 'With its pro-sound solid sitka spruce top, the resonance and balanced sonic qualities of the P-02E will only improve with age'. The African sapele, sometimes referred to as African mahogany, is the perfect companion to the brightness of Sitka spruce bringing a degree of warmth and resonance to the tone.

With the body binding and multi-lined rosette, both in Canadian Maple, and a tasteful teardrop tortoiseshell pickguard, the overall impression is of understated excellence. Inside, keeping the top in its



LARRIVÉE P-02E

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Larrivée
Model: P-02E
RRP: £1149
Body Size: Parlour
Made In: USA
Top: Solid Canadian Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Solid African sapele
Max Rim Depth: 101.6mm
Max Body Width: 336.6mm
Neck: One-piece mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 18
Bridge: Ebony
Nut Width: 44.5mm
Scale Length: 609.6mm
Weight: 1.6kg
Onboard Electrics: Shadow Nanoflex
Controls: Volume, Bass, Treble.
Tuners: Chrome 18:1
Left Hand Option: Yes
Finishes Available: N/A
Gig Bag/Case Included: Larrivée hard-shell case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Fantastic tone, reeks quality, dream to play
Cons: None come to mind
Overall: All solid woods, great value, affordable luxury

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★★
Sound Quality: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★

CONTACT DETAILS

www.soundtech.co.uk/music-retail/larrivee

rightful place while allowing it to ring out, is solid Austrian spruce scalloped parabolic X Bracing. Shining my torch inside, there is clearly no drop in the quality of the workmanship with lovely clean seams on display.

Electronics-wise we have a Shadow Nanoflex system with a strap button jack socket and the battery being contained in a velcroed pocket accessed via the sound hole. Controls are mounted just on the inside of the hole and are volume and blend.

SOUND QUALITY

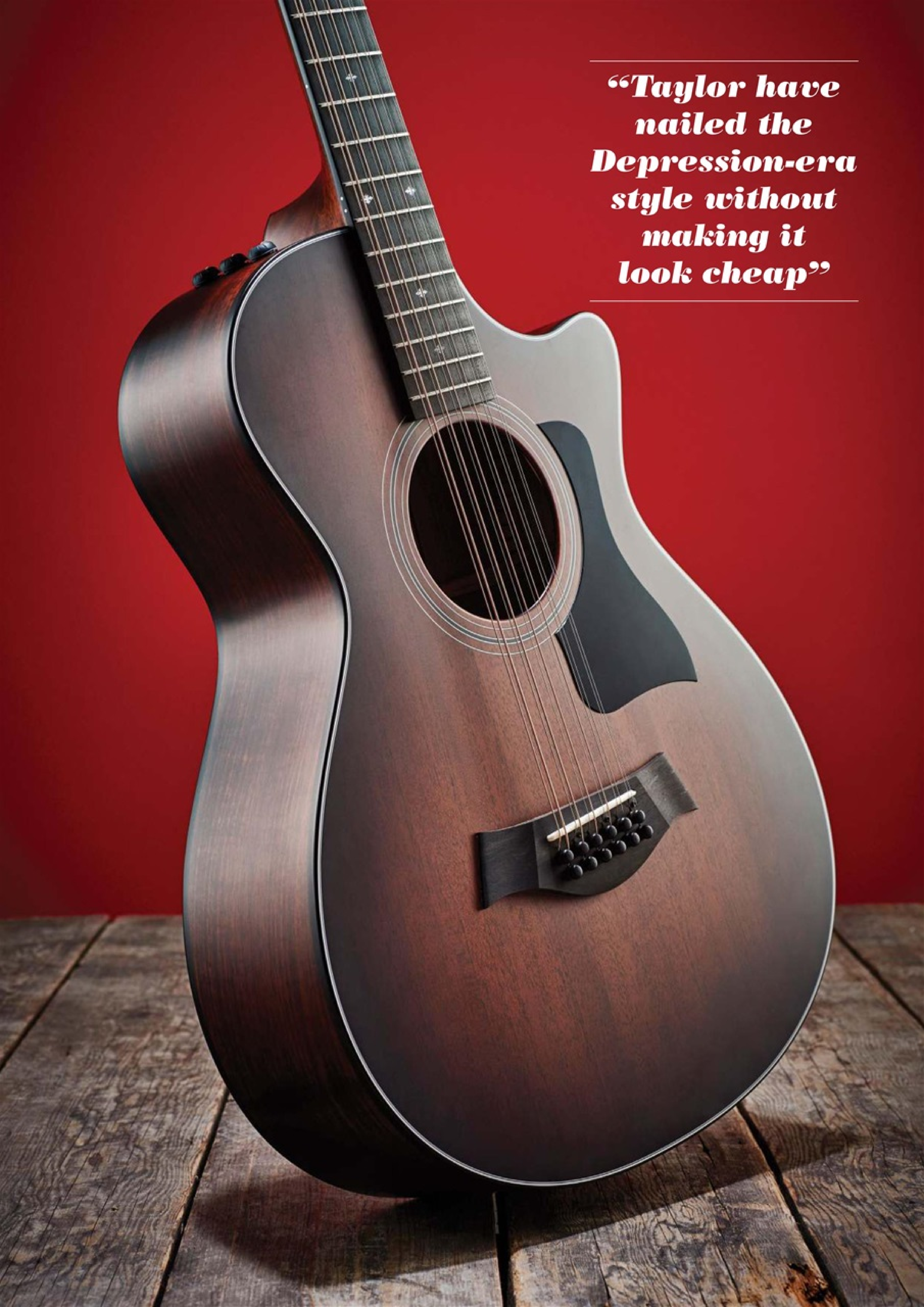
Strum a chord and you are immediately struck by the quality of the tonal balance, each note ringing out and identifiable. The sustain is great, in fact if you lift it away from your body it will ring on forever. Playing fingerstyle is a delight to behold too; the definition is all there to be heard and the tones are sweet.

Of course, a parlour guitar isn't going to outblast a dreadnought, but the P-02E certainly projects and has ample volume to sing along with comfortably. The neck is extremely comfortable; the satin finish making it an easy slide up and down and it fits in your palm like an old friend. The action is just right, low, without being too low. In fact, overall it has that indefinable quality which I guess every manufacturer strives for – you just can't put it down. Every time I walked past it on the stand I had to pick it up and have a widdle.

Then of course, you plug it in...WHAT?! This little lady sounds huge through an amp. I'm not overly familiar with Shadow pickups but I can only say that those guys at Larrivée must have done their homework because to get an amplified tone this sweet is outstanding. It would definitely hold its own in a band situation.

CONCLUSION

As I stated at the beginning, there is a huge amount of competition in this area of the market. Sure, there are many guitars a lot cheaper but, if you are a serious player looking for a quality parlour guitar that's as comfortable on stage as it is in your front room then you've got to try this little gem. I can see this being the one you leave lying around in the sitting room, the one that causes your partner to give you that look as they try to watch telly. But seriously, at this price point, given the outstanding build quality and tone, I think it is fantastic value for money. And, as your man says, it's only going to get better with age. Perhaps if I get a sandbag, put it in the case and send it back no one will notice...? ■



“Taylor have nailed the Depression-era style without making it look cheap”

TAYLOR 362CE

Taylor's Grand Concert 12-string promises easy playability for six-string addicts. Sam Wise goes cold turkey

The first thing that comes to mind when I hear I'm going to be sent a Taylor for review is that I know what I'm going to get. Taylor has gone from launch to the largest acoustic guitar manufacturer in 43 years by getting things right, and then sticking with them. This is not to say they don't innovate; Taylor are always improving details on their guitars, but there's nothing wild and wacky. When you pick up a Taylor, you're going to get a well made, very playable, sweet sounding guitar which you can rely on, and which will look classy and understated. The 362ce, and its sister the 352 are no exception.

BUILD QUALITY

Having said you know what you'll get, the 362ce, while instantly recognisable as a Taylor, has its own visual signature. It's a Grand Auditorium, Taylor's signature shape, designed by Bob Taylor as the ultimate all-rounder and still the mainstay of their range. The top is mahogany, and in keeping with the current trend towards giving guitars a Depression-era style, it's satin finished in a dark, faded-looking sunburst that Taylor are calling 'edgeburst'. Back and sides are Tasmanian blackwood, bound in black plastic for an overall very dark look. This is an appropriate point to discuss the fact that, for a Taylor, this is basically a budget model. Despite being priced at around £1800 on the street, the 300 series is Taylor's lowest priced all solid range, and while they're not quite poverty spec (there are three series below it), you certainly don't get exotic wood binding and fancy inlay work for your money. The combination of Taylor's brand strength, reputation for quality, and more than anything the cost of American labour against that of Asia means that the Taylor needs to stack up in other areas to look like a good choice.

The rosette is simple black and white, there's a plain black scratchplate, and a simple bowtie bridge in what looks like rosewood, but in these CITES days might be a different material. It has a micarta (synthetic bone) saddle, and at the other end of the strings you'll find a Tusq nut. The neck has a shorter than average scale length of 24 and 7/8 inches, which will contribute to lower string tension, and 18 frets on the ebony board. Fretboard inlays have a diamond/snowflake appearance, there are white edge position markers, and a trademark Taylor coffin-like headstock with 12 Taylor branded closed back tuners. The matt black volume, treble and bass controls on the shoulder are barely visible, and don't detract from the guitar's appearance at all. Overall, the look is very understated, and Taylor have nailed the Depression-era style without making the guitar look cheap. You can imagine this guitar being played in the corner of a dusty boxcar, but equally, it won't look out of place in the premium acoustic section of a guitar shop. The unflashy nature of the 3 series lends itself to this aesthetic, and we were very taken with the 362.

Quality-wise, Taylor don't do things any other way but right, and the 362ce is no exception. Everything aspect of the guitar is executed to perfection; fret ends are perfectly smooth, the minimal decoration is crisp and clean, and a peek inside the soundhole reveals bracing that could be outerwear rather than underwear. The tuners are positive, smooth and stable, and Taylor's Expression System 2 pickup, with the piezos behind, rather than under the saddle, is reliably excellent.

SOUND QUALITY

Twelve-strings are often dreadnoughts, and that, combined with higher string tension from twice as many strings, and for those of us who first tried a cheap 12, often very high action can render them hard work to play. The mid sized body makes it easy to wrap your arms around the 362; it's not a parlour, but it's easy to embrace it while sat in your armchair. On the strap, it suffers a little from neck dive, as most 12-strings will, but it's admirably light weight makes it comfortable to wear. As befits a Taylor, the action is low and slick, the string tension

is totally manageable even if you're new to 12-strings, and the intonation is perfect across the board, not so easy to achieve when you are running pairs of strings an octave apart.

Sound-wise, Taylor describe mahogany as having a woody, dry tone as a topwood, but that's not how we experienced it. Maybe it's just all those extra treble strings chiming, but the 362 actually sounds really open, ringing and bright. Listen in a more forensic way, picking the individual bass strings while avoiding their octave-up pairs for example, and you can hear that trademark chocolatey darkness to the mids and lows. No doubt if we were able to play it alongside its spruce-topped sister, the 352, we would hear a brighter tone, but the balance here is wonderful. Flatpicked or strummed, the 362 really sang, and made me explore music that perhaps I wouldn't have tried on a 12-string; lead parts and single note runs.

TAYLOR 362CE

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Taylor
Model: 362ce
RRP: £ 2519
Body Size: Grand Auditorium
Made In: USA
Top: Mahogany
Back and Sides: Tasmanian Blackwood
Max Rim Depth: 111.1mm
Max Body Width: 381mm
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 18
Bridge: Rosewood
Nut Width: 47.6mm
Scale Length: 631.8mm
Weight: 2.04kg
Electronics: Expression System 2 behind saddle piezo
Controls: Bass, Treble, Volume
Tuners: Taylor sealed nickel
Left Hand Option: Yes
Finishes Available: Edgeburst
Gig Bag/Case Included: Taylor hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Simple, classy looks, great tone
Cons: Rather expensive for the spec
Overall: A truly excellent guitar, with reliably great performance

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★½
Sound Quality: ★★★★½
Overall: ★★★★

CONTACT DETAILS

www.taylorguitars.com

> **"It's reliability that keeps Taylor afloat and selling strongly"**

Fingerstyle was also rewarding, with the light action allowing complex work to ring out nicely.

The 362 is tremendously rewarding to play acoustically, and the extra volume of a 12-string might make you feel you don't need to reach for a cable, but if you do, you're covered. The Expression System claims to avoid a lot of the piezo 'quack' and excessive paunchiness of upper mid and trebles which beset many pickup systems, but placing the pickups just behind the saddle, rather than under it. Plugging in, we find that this has been successful; you're getting pretty much the acoustic tone, but louder, which really ought to be more common in 2017. The controls are simple to use without looking at them; each knob has a centre détente and a marker you can feel with your finger, so getting to the tone you want is as easy as can be. It would be nice to have a tuner, but then a more complicated head unit, particularly one with any lighting, would interfere with the aesthetic, so maybe it's churlish to complain.

CONCLUSION

We were right from the outset; you know what you're going to get with a Taylor: an excellent guitar, built and set up to the highest standards, with a tone to match. It's that reliability that keeps Taylor afloat and selling strongly as the tide of excellent imports rises. Simple, understated good looks, a flexible, winning tone, and quality that you can trust are taken as read. That they've tamed most of the challenges associated with a 12-string is just the icing on the cake. If you want a 12-string that doesn't require the grip of the hulk or the reach of Stretch Armstrong, you should try this guitar. It will not disappoint. ■

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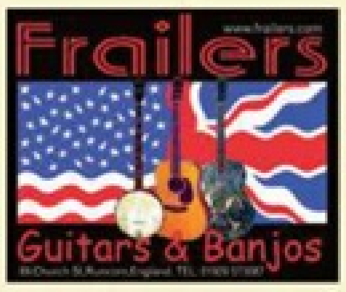

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"Eco-friendliness is clearly at the top of the AGI agenda"

AGI PARLOUR 13

Reluctant to trust baggage handlers with your precious acoustic? If so, check out this nifty solution to a perennial problem, says Joel McIver

Wiltshire-based luthier Felix Byrne, operating as Acoustic Guitar Innovation, is clearly a man with a vision when it comes to creating travel guitars. You don't need to be a structural engineer to appreciate how difficult it must be to design and build a guitar that does the following things:

1) Folds up into a space the same size as, or smaller than, the dimensions accepted by airlines as hand luggage;

2) Performs said folding (and unfolding) in a relatively easy manner that won't break the strings or trigger any other sources of massive stress for the owner;

3) Looks, and definitely sounds, like a decent acoustic guitar that can be sold at an appropriate price point.

Rather Felix than me – but by jingo, he's pulled it off with the Parlour 13. Even though it comes in at less than £600, this instrument crams in features for which certain other luthiers would charge four figures. What's more, it's a hand-built guitar, made in the UK: no imports-derived savings here.

Essentially, what we've got here is a parlour-sized acoustic with an unusual neck and an even more unusual bridge, both of which we'll come to in a moment. The neck joint is the crux of the instrument's functionality, allowing the neck and body to separate and be stowed in any reasonable-sized case. The Parlour 13 comes in a soft but sturdy gigbag with full instructions and a set of spare strings.

It's a small guitar, with a maximum depth of 98mm and a body that measures 460mm by 328mm at maximum, although the neck scale is a standard-ish 25.24 inches (in old money); a 23.85 inch scale is also available on request. In fact the neck and headstock are the weightiest part of the instrument, which weighs in around 4lb and which suffers from a balance bias at the head end for obvious reasons. Add a strap and most of this goes away, though.

Eco-friendliness is clearly at the top of the AGI agenda, with the top of our review model made of a spruce and walnut sandwich. The former has been reclaimed from an old painting stretcher, a device which tautens artists' canvases, and the latter from a mid-twentieth century wardrobe. Now that's upcycling. The same walnut goes into the neck, as does a strip of aluminium (hence its weight), and the other woods are mostly HDF (high-density fibreboard), with or without a high-pressure laminate coating for durability. You have plenty of other options when it comes to the body woods, though, with AGI suggesting oak, elm, spruce, Douglas fir, walnut, beech and sycamore for the top, singly or in combination.

Before we do the magic trick of taking the Parlour 13 apart and then reassembling it – a task which makes us a bit nervous, if we're honest – let's see how it stands up as a 'normal' guitar. The headstock bias mentioned above isn't really an issue, but you may well be a touch unnerved by the feel of the neck you first time you tackle it. This is partly to do with the aluminium strip running down the back, which obviously feels different to the surrounding walnut in texture and temperature, but also to do with its unusual profile. Where a standard guitar neck might have a C or a D profile, this one has what resembles a lower-case 'm' profile, with a couple of soft ridges running parallel to that central metal strip. This doesn't render the guitar difficult to play by any means, it just takes a minute to get used to the feel.

The other point of major interest is the bridge, a beautifully elegant unit that makes you realise how much bridge pins tend to clutter up the top of any guitar. The through-bridge design tucks the string ends out of sight, apparently transferring most of the job of adjusting the action to the allen-key sockets at either end of the body – another unusual, but effective solution. When we tweaked said sockets with the supplied allen key, it took no more than a few seconds to arrive at the action we were looking for.

The volume is surprisingly loud for such a small guitar, making the Parlour 13 feel

suitable for use in small gatherings with no need for internal electronics (a range of which are available on request, AGI tell us). The tone range is excellent too, with biting upper mids and top, plus a bottom end that is bigger than you'd expect. Of course, if you were after a massive bass tone you probably wouldn't be investigating a parlour-sized guitar in the first place, but bear in mind anyway that the most prominent tones here are towards the top end.

We're satisfied that the Parlour 13 sounds and plays great in its assembled state, in other words before we apply our sausage fingers to its innards: so far, so good. It's time to take it apart, though, so we find a suitably unrisky surface to place the guitar on and stand well clear to survey the area. No large pieces of furniture nearby, which might trap a dropped component underneath them? Any small children or pets around who might decide that eating an allen key is a great idea? No gratings, drains or other holes in the ground which might suck in an expensive bit of Parlour 13? No, so stop procrastinating...

First off, detune all the strings by eight turns or so. This means they'll be slack, but not falling all over the place. Bear in mind that plenty of tuning up and down is part and parcel of the travel-guitar experience, so keep a tuner and/or roadie handy. Then unscrew the two prominent wooden dowels at either end of the body, remembering to store them somewhere safe (lose one, and it's game over,

AGI PARLOUR 13

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Acoustic Guitar Innovation
Model: Parlour 13
RRP: £575
Body size: Parlour
Made in: Wiltshire, UK
Top: Spruce and walnut (reclaimed)
Back and Sides: High density fibreboard (reclaimed)
Max Rim Depth: 98mm
Max Body Width: 328mm
Neck: Aluminium and walnut (reclaimed)
Fingerboard: HP laminate and HDF
Frets: 18 medium Dutch Nickel Silver frets
Bridge: HP laminate and HDF
Nut Width: 43.5mm
Scale Length: 642mm
Weight: 1.8kg
Onboard Electrics: Option available
Tuners: Standard chrome (can be chosen by customer)
Lefthand Option: Yes
Finishes Available: Choice of native reclaimed timbers
Gig Bag/Case included: Mojo 400 gigbag or similar

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Solid, high-quality components; cunning design
Cons: A little tricky to take apart
Overall: An excellent solution to the 'travelling acoustic' problem

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ●●●●○
Sound Quality: ●●●●○
Overall: ●●●●○

CONTACT DETAILS

www.acousticguitarinnovation.co.uk

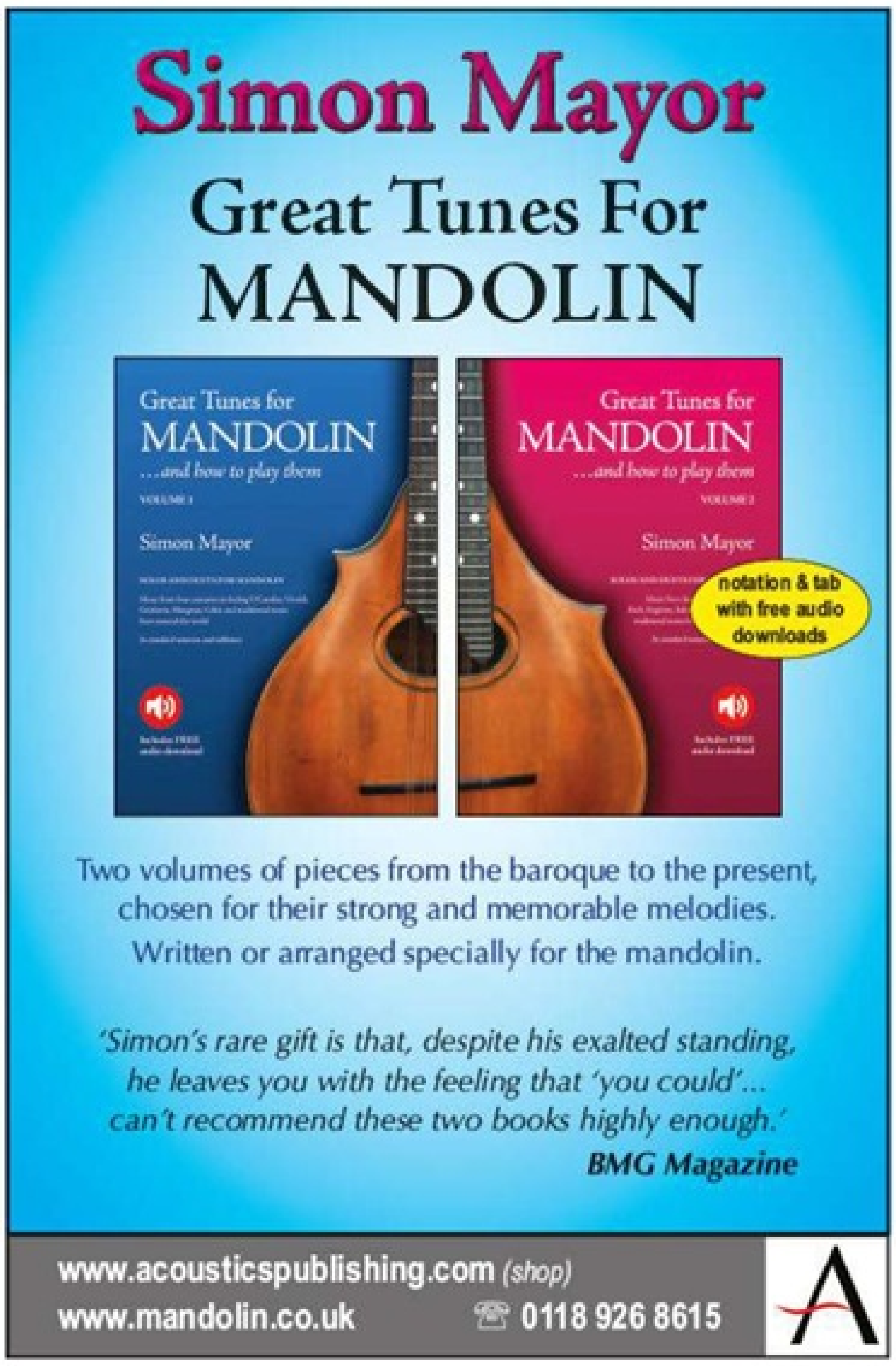
"Stuff the body with your underwear, tuck the headstock in and go"

pal). Now the tricky bit: folding the neck up and out of the body. This takes a good few minutes for us to achieve, partly because the two sections grip together like a vice – as indeed they should – but also because we're afraid that we'll break something if we try to pull the neck and body apart too hard. It turns out that we needn't have worried, as the parts are apparently tough as nails: after a lot of pressure here and there, the neck lifts swiftly and smoothly out of the body.

You find yourself in an unusual position here, holding a heavy neck and headstock in one hand, attached to a guitar body by six strings that you don't want to break – so tread carefully. The next step is to detach the headstock from the neck, which is easy, and then to place the neck to one side. Assuming you're about to get on a plane, stow the neck in a suitcase for the hold, as customs staff are unlikely to let you take a heavy chunk of metal and walnut on board. Stuff the body with your underwear, tuck the headstock into a safe place in your carry-on bag and you're set to go. AGI recommend that you remove the strings entirely before you fly, which sounds sensible.

At your destination, reverse the process. This is much easier, although – like us – you may find that the strings want to occupy the wrong nut slots when you put the guitar back together, resulting in bad language. Adjust the action and that's it. We're impressed.

So who needs this guitar? Travelling acoustic musicians, of course. Whether anyone else will bother is a moot point, but the Parlour 13 is a value-packed instrument at this price point – so if you do decide to think outside the box, we don't think you'll regret it. ■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FAITH BLOOD MOON SATURN

Alun Lower howls at the sky with the latest addition to Faith's exotic-looking Blood Moon series

When you've got a good thing going, keep running with it. It's a rule that has served the guitar world well over the decades – can you imagine if Martin had only ever made one guitar in their all-mahogany 15 Series, or if Fender made just one Strat and then left it at that for the rest of time? Let's just say the news section in your favourite guitar rag would be a little thin on the ground, shall we?

So expansion is the name of the game, then – and when Faith launched their sumptuous Blood Moon Venus model last year it was met with universal acclaim, eventually winning itself a few awards thanks in no small part to the wonderfully unique choice of highly figured Javanese trembesi as a tonewood. Fast forward to 2017 and we've now got a trio of body styles to choose from, with the dreadnought-shaped Saturn and the baby-jumbo stylings of the Neptune joining the fray. And so, with the original Blood Moon Venus proving a sonic delight in every respect, I was excited to see how these rather lovely tonewoods would work with a dreadnought body style.

BUILD QUALITY

With legendary British luthier Patrick James Eggle lending his expertise to the brand, Faith's guitars have always featured impeccable build quality that pays as much attention to the smallest details as much as it does to the biggest headline features, and that's very much the case here too. The big story is, of course, the aforementioned solid Javanese trembesi that has been used for the top, back and sides of the instrument – a spectacular-looking tonewood. The smoky 'Blood Moon' burst finish works wonderfully with the smooth gloss finish, bringing out the very best of the grain and figuring of the wood, and is also set off by solid flamed maple binding and abalone rosette. There's always a risk that woods like these will look a little too showy, but I don't think many people will consider that to be the case here – everything is very tastefully done and sits just on the right side of flashy.

Elsewhere on the body, the bridge and its pins are all made from Macassan figured ebony, with a row of abalone dots also gracing the tops of the pins. Internally the Saturn features Patrick James Eggle's X-brace design bracing (made from quarter-sawn spruce), and the woodwork here is, as always, spotless in every way. Eggle's influence can also be seen at the base of the bolt on mahogany neck, which is another in-house design of his. The neck is finished in satin for a smooth and comfortable playing experience, and is topped by a Macassan figured ebony fingerboard, inlaid only with the always-elegant Faith 'F' on the 12th fret. Grover rotomatic tuners keep the strings in tune nicely and provide an effortlessly smooth operation, while the nut and saddle are both made from TUSQ.

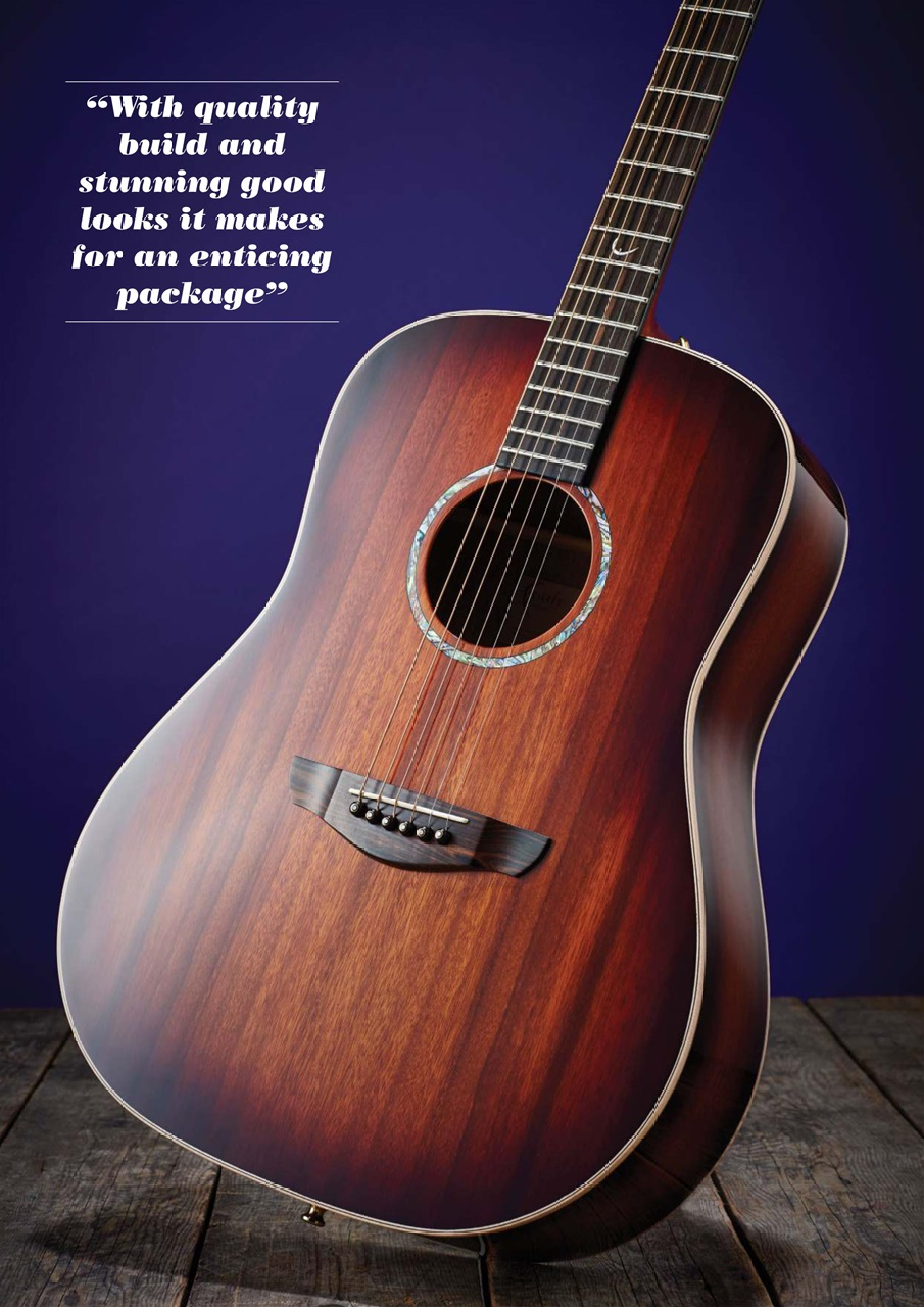
A quality hardcase is included for the price, but one big omission when you compare the Saturn to the Neptune and older Venus model is a lack of electronics package. The former comes equipped with a Fishman INK/Sonicore setup, while the latter sports a Shadow Performer/Nanoflex configuration. The dreadnought is a little cheaper as a result, but the lack of an option might be frustrating to those that want the versatility of an electro coupled with the tones of a dreadnought. Not only that, but it makes the decision to offer two straplocks a little bit puzzling.

Playability-wise the Saturn is every bit as wonderful as you'd hope. The guitar feels balanced and comfortable on the lap, the frets are smooth and well-fitted, and the 16" radius neck feels good in the hand for any style of playing. Coupled with the high quality build and stunning good looks, it really does make for an enticing package, which leads us nicely onto the tonal performance.

SOUND QUALITY

Grabbing your favourite plectrum and digging in for those first few tentative open chords is a joyous experience with the Blood Moon Saturn. Faith describe the tone of the Javanese trembesi

“With quality build and stunning good looks it makes for an enticing package”



as being similar to Koa, offering the warmth and body of mahogany with just a touch of rosewood finesse added into the mix. For all the marketing guff that you often here from guitar makers about their instruments' tones, in this case it turns out to be a very accurate description. There is an unmistakable push from the mids that feels so earth rattling against your ribcage that it almost has a physical, tangible quality to it. It thuds and pops with definition and soul, but where all-mahogany instruments can get a little stuck in their tonal niche, the Saturn offers a touch more high-end sparkle and low-end clarity, in a very similar way to a spruce/rosewood combo.

What you get is a guitar that covers a very broad tonal spectrum right from the off – it's the definition of 'room-filling' and it's got a lovely natural taper to the notes that just begs you to let them ring out. Another benefit of this expanded tonal spectrum is that fingerstyle sounds a lot more pronounced and characterful than it would on your average dreadnought (certainly a spruce-topped one, at any rate). However, that's not to say the guitar doesn't still sound like a dread – it does – and as such, fingerstyle purists and those that adopt a mix of styles will still probably find they get better results from the other body shapes offered in the range.

“It offers tones that give strummers a lovely canvas to work with”

FAITH BLOOD MOON SATURN

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Faith
Model: FSBMB Blood Moon Saturn
RRP: £829
Body Size: Dreadnought
Made In: Indonesia
Top: Solid Javanese trembesi
Back and Sides: Solid Javanese trembesi
Max Rim Depth: 120mm
Max Body Width: 392mm
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Macassar figured ebony
Frets: 20
Bridge: Macassar figured ebony
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electrics: No
Tuners: Grober Rotomatic
Left Hand Option: No
Finishes Available: Blood Moon Burst
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hardcase

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Looks and sounds sublime
Cons: Not quite as dynamic and exciting as other available body shapes, and also lacks their electronics
Overall: A fine addition to a genuinely exciting range of guitars – but try them all first

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build quality: ★★★★☆
Sound quality: ★★★★☆
Overall: ★★★★☆

CONTACT DETAILS

www.faithguitars.com

CONCLUSION

I'm faced with a dilemma with the Blood Moon Saturn. As a purely acoustic dreadnought it's a delight – offering a lovely set of tones that expand slightly over your average dreadnought and give strummers a lovely canvas to work with. From that point of view alone there's little to criticise and if that's the type of guitar you're after you can probably add that elusive final star to this review. However, when compared with the other guitars in the Blood Moon stable, the Saturn feels like it's holding something back by lacking an electro option.

Not only that, but for any player that has even the slightest interest in fingerstyle, the other guitars in the range also offer a slightly more dynamic set of tones that can more easily be adapted to multiple styles. The Saturn remains a wonderful instrument – a joy to play and to listen to – but if you're shopping in this kind of price range I suspect that there will be some of you that would happily spend a little extra to get the increased versatility offered by the alternative models. For that reason, I'd suggest trying the entire lineup to find the right one for your playing style. Whichever you choose, you'll be taking home a very special instrument indeed. ■

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FRESHMAN WALNUT CONCERT AND ASH TENOR UKULELES

A uke is a uke, right? Not true, says Joel McIver, getting to grips with two very different Freshman models

If you're new to the noble art of playing ukulele, you'll probably encounter some serious obstacles to fully enjoying the experience, not least among which is the inevitable idea that these miniature instruments are somehow less playable and/or useful than a full-sized guitar. This is only true in context – in other words, a uke won't deliver the frequency range of a standard acoustic.

Then again, in stripped-back environments, where minimal accompaniment is required, you wouldn't use the full range of a guitar anyway. Find the right song, and your uke will fit in perfectly – a revelation that has clearly occurred to thousands of acoustic musicians over the last decade or two, a period in which this most humble of unplugged instruments has come to the fore.

As you'll recall from previous reviews of the ukuleles which have landed on the *Acoustic* doormat, there's a wide range of variants to choose from. As with any instrument tested in these pages, paying for quality is advisable, and doubly so when you're using such a small, relatively delicate instrument. For the same outlay as these mid-market ukes, which come in at £129.95 (Walnut Concert) and £109.95 (Ash Tenor), you could buy a perfectly serviceable full-sized guitar – so let's hope they bring high quality to the table.

The Walnut Concert, the smaller uke of the two, is a thing of beauty from the moment you lift it out of its padded gigbag. The bodywood is the obvious attractor, with an arm bevel chamfered into the upper rear hip for playing comfort. This will be a welcome addition for anyone who regularly suffers from 'uke chafe' thanks to the compact playing position you have to adopt to play these fun-sized instruments correctly.

Details such as a bone nut add value to the standard rosewood fingerboard, and while the machine heads are adequate rather than the

tank-like units which players always yearn for on a ukelele, they do the job well enough. As we've said before in these pages, all too many cheap ukuleles – bought on a whim for a tenner – end up as landfill because they simply don't stay in tune, and are a pain to play as a result. Never underestimate the importance of decent tuners: without them, you'll be retuning every 30 seconds.

The volume is immediately striking. By rights this instrument shouldn't be able to project notes beyond a few metres, but we tested it in a large room and found that, background noise and absorption by crowd and furniture notwithstanding, there's enough punch to be heard beyond the expected range. Flatpicking with firm downstrokes brings out the best in the uke, and alternating picking rewards you with a nippy response: you can even give your wrist a workout for some bouzouki-esque tremolo picking, where the arm rest really comes in handy.

The tone is brittle at the top end, as you'd expect – and indeed, demand from a uke – but there's warmth to be had too, especially if you ditch the pick and use fingerstyle near the neck. Response diminishes towards the dusty end of the fingerboard, with 14 accessible frets of 18, but that's to be expected. At this end of the frequency range, what you really need – assuming you want anyone to hear you – is amplification, which is where you might want to reach for this instrument's bigger brother.

The Ash Tenor ukulele costs £20 less than the Walnut Concert, which might seem a bit odd considering that it's bigger and contains a pickup and preamp system, but that's the cost of walnut for you. In fact there is walnut present here in the form of the fingerboard, but the main tonewood is ash, an inferior but still totally usable substitute.

Ash is known for its brightness, and there's plenty of that here, backed up with extra volume courtesy of the bigger body. As with the smaller instrument, the hardware is functional rather than scintillating, but again, remember that we're at a mid-market price point. Spend £300 on a uke with top-notch tuners by all means – these instruments clearly aren't aimed at that sector.

Plug in and you'll be supplied with a resonant, cutting tone that is all about top end and high mids. There's bass here, but you'll have to dig deep to achieve it: a sweet,

"The arm bevel is a welcome addition for those who suffer from 'uke chafe'"

FRESHMAN ASH TENOR UKULELE

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Freshman
Model: UKASHTE
RRP: £109.95
Body Size: Tenor
Made In: China
Top: Ash (laminate)
Back and Sides: Ash (laminate)
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Walnut
Frets: 18 (14 accessible)
Bridge: Walnut
Nut Width: 35mm
Electronics: Freshman KLT-16A preamp and pickup system
Controls: 3-band EQ
Left Hand Option: No
Finishes Available: Satin
Gig Bag/Case Included: Yes

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Excellent electronics and preamp
Cons: None
Overall: Highly usable performance uke

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality:
Sound Quality:
Overall:

FRESHMAN WALNUT CONCERT UKULELE

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Freshman
Model: UKWALT
RRP: £129.95
Body Size: Tenor
Made In: China
Top: Walnut
Back and Sides: Walnut
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Walnut
Frets: 18 (14 accessible)
Bridge: Walnut
Nut Width: 35mm
Left Hand Option: No
Finishes Available: Gloss
Gig Bag/Case Included: Yes

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: High-quality tonewood
Cons: No electronics
Overall: Fun and functional uke

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality:
Sound Quality:
Overall:

CONTACT DETAILS

www.freshmanguitars.net

> ***"Hanging the uke around your knees in a punk band might be inadvisable"***

toppy sound is where this uke is happiest. The Freshman electronics comprise a hidden pickup and a control panel atop the body. Here you'll find bass, middle and treble sliders that are a mite plastic and lightweight, but the comment above about pricey gear applies here too. They function perfectly well for any reasonable performance situation, unless you're a pro musician in need of pro studio gear, in which case you'll need to shell out a bit sight more than £109.

There's some serious boost to be had with the volume control: in fact, we were rewarded with a slice of feedback that scared the dog, so watch out. The control panel also features a tuner, a stroke of genius, because – as said above – ukes are notorious for suddenly deciding to detune themselves right before your amazing solo moment. The tuners will almost certainly do their job with no more than a quick check between each number, but as you're probably going to be worried about the tuning on a constant basis, it's a real bonus.

Insert your cable at the rear strap button, adjacent to the battery compartment. Pay attention when replacing the two button batteries: the pop-out mounting for them has been expertly designed and pops out easily – you may drop them. When that happens, they'll inevitably roll under the drum kit and your gig will be doomed.

The playability of the Ash Tenor is, like the bigger uke, one of its most attractive features. Whether you play seated, standing with a strap (contrary to popular belief, this is doable, although hanging the uke around your knees in a punk band is inadvisable) or simply played pressed against your chest, this uke likes to be strummed. Try a C chord – a favourite among guitar converts because it's so easy; just play the third fret on the first string and leave the other strings open – and you'll get a positive, powerful response, relatively speaking.

While we enjoyed playing both, we recommend the bigger, cheaper, amplifiable Ash Tenor over its slightly higher quality but pickupless sibling. There's little sense in paying for a better tonewood if you can't plug and play. Ignore that if you're a walnut fan, of course – as in life, taste in ukuleles is highly individual. Either way, you won't go far wrong with either of these instruments. ■

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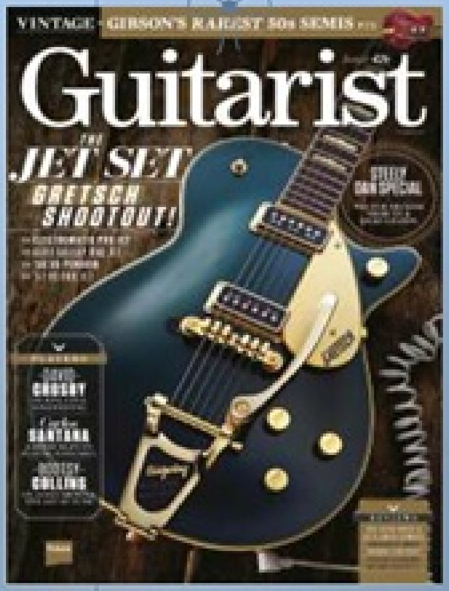

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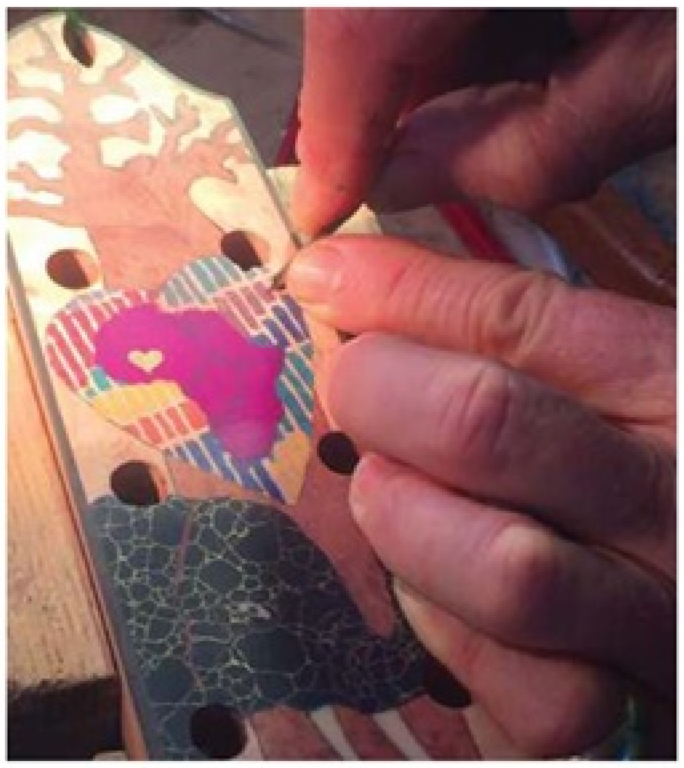
MARC MAINGARD

South Africa's Marc Maingard is a fine luthier with reputable status, working from the seaside town of Scarborough, on the Cape Peninsula. We caught up with the master craftsman

WORDS: EMILY BIELBY

"In 1972 I was living in the south of Spain, working as a musician; during the day I was bored with the flat Mediterranean and started to hang out with the guitar makers," says Marc, when asked about his journey into lutherie. "On my return to South Africa in 1973, my guitars were damaged and I took on the repair myself. Other players saw what I did and asked me to do adjustments to their guitars too and that's how I started." It may have been the social gatherings with guitar makers in Spain that gave Marc the nudge to start building his own but he first learned the craft via a book by Sloan in 1976. "I actually made five guitars using this book. It was not an easy process, but I was fortunate to have learnt cabinet-making skills. The end result was a very good-sounding nylon string guitar, nothing like the concert classicals or crossover guitars that I make today, but nonetheless, good to look at and a fine sounding guitar," admits Marc.

Undergoing an apprenticeship program with Santa Cruz Guitar Company and spending time with Richard Hoover allowed Marc to become more involved with the building side, and he familiarised himself with craftsmanship, which led to him becoming a reputable repairman.



"While studying with Santa Cruz Guitar Company, I made contact with Chris Martin and Gibson; the repairs done to these guitars in South Africa were terrible. I went and spent time with them and in those days there were very few authenticated repair people, but on seeing my work they appointed me for repair work in South Africa." Marc also travelled around the US and visited many master luthiers from whom he learnt ideas and secrets off.

Marc's first acoustic was an old plywood Yamaki, which helped him earn a living in Europe for three years before he upgraded to a Martin, but to my surprise, Marc is not an avid collector; his collection is limited: just four guitars, all his own handmade choices. "I love Santa Cruz guitars; they are still to a large degree handmade. Martin, Gibson and Ovation are nowadays factory-made, they do not compare to handmade guitars anymore. They do not come close to my guitars in any way," says Marc.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Although Marc is semi-retired, he still spends around four hours a day in his workshop: "I do not consider what I do as work, it's really a fun process, in a real, actively dangerous place, spinning blades etc. I do a lot by hand too. I start around midday to 5pm, 7 days a week. I totally love what I do, so it makes sense to be there. Each day I set a goal, maybe to complete a rosette or finish a neck. Clients come to me with specific ideas for inlays and trim as well as neck shapes and sizes. They usually give me a general idea and let me work the rest out. I listen to what the client requires, we usually trade 30 to 40 emails on design, then it's done. I have a few models to choose from, the rest is trim or inlays or my storyboard guitars. The storytelling of players' lives done in inlay on a guitar are the bigger projects," he explains.

PLAYER TIP

"Older players such as myself often suffer from wrist or hand issues, but I've found that once I adjust my position to perch the guitar on my left thigh, classical style, neck elevated, all issues are resolved"

Is this a one-man job? "One guitar takes 200 hours and I work 100 per cent alone unless it's a big story, then I use a conceptual artist and fine artist for the initial inlay drawings. Back in 2005 with three apprentices I was making 30 guitars per year, now alone I make four using the very best of aged and master grade timbers," Marc explains.

Catering for all level of player, the South African luthier has built 359 guitars since he started. Marc is very particular with his woods. "I work only in Brazilian rosewood, African blackwood and cocobolo. I've gathered old woods from all over the world but I exclusively use Alpine spruce for my tops. I select all my woods and don't use any less than 10 years old. Some of my tops are 35 years old; these are reserved for the top end guitars. Ninety-nine percent of clients come to me because of the Brazilian rosewood or blackwood. There are few woods here in South Africa; the best is African blackwood and pink ivory."

The rest of the year remains busy for Marc, who is currently working on two guitars, including an OM and crossover Earl Klugh model. He leaves budding luthiers with the following trick of the trade. "Do the same as I did; find a builder you resonate with and work with him or her, making guitars for whatever they offer, even if it's only board and lodging." ■

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THINKING INSIDE THE BOX

Hole lotta sense or just an affectation? For part four of Nick's 'Functional or Just For Fun?' series we continue to talk additional soundports

WORDS: NICK BENJAMIN

This month let's carry on talking about extra soundholes. These are often added in the form of a 'side-port', usually done with the aim of making it easier for the player to hear themselves but sometimes done to change the response of a particular aspect of a guitar. It's a big subject and last month I didn't get much further than talking about the function and reason for particular positioning of traditional soundholes. Now I will get onto the potential effects of changing the traditional system with an extra hole, or maybe more...!

If we were to have no soundhole at all, the air in the soundbox, that I described as a sympathetic bass resonator last month, would be very effectively trapped and therefore a good tuned resonator but any sound vibrations of that air would only be able to exit from inside the soundbox by exciting the walls of the box into vibration so they radiated the sound – very inefficient compared to a direct exit via a soundhole. So the size of the soundhole is a balancing act between being 1) small enough to trap the air effectively (so that it is a bass resonant lump) while being 2) big enough to allow the right amount of sound energy out (and give added bass depth, warmth and texture – while tuning the main air resonance to a useful pitch to reinforce the lowest notes).

SIZE MATTERS

A smaller soundhole will lower the guitar body's main air resonance frequency (often called a Helmholtz resonance) but allow less warm bass tone out: I actually use a smaller soundhole on my low tuned baritone guitars to tighten up and deepen the bass response: controlling the bass rather than boosting it, perhaps counter-intuitively for a low tuned instrument. With a very large hole, the air in the body would no longer be trapped at all and it would be as if the soundboard was in free air like a piano, with the very immediate but bass light tone used on a relatively smaller guitar. When most makers add an extra soundhole or 'port' the size is such that we are getting nowhere near stopping the air in the body acting as a resonant lump separated from the air around the guitar. But they are, of course, allowing more sound out from inside the box. The intention is to allow the player to hear better, unless the main soundhole is made smaller to compensate for the addition, something done surprisingly rarely. What type of sound we hear from the extra hole and how this might effect the overall balance of the guitar's tone depends on many factors; the shape and size of the hole and the way the guitar is built in the first place being probably the most important.

Grit Laskin is one of the pioneers of the sideport

If you read back through my descriptions these last two months it sounds like I am describing quite a chaotic jumble of sound going on inside the soundbox with some louder peaky resonances at particular frequencies: do we really want to point that sound directly at our ears? Recording engineers rarely point a mic directly into the soundhole of a guitar to get a representation of its overall sound (unless the guitar is severely lacking in the bass department due to its overall design): generally

> "A SOUNDHOLE ON A DEEP, CLEAR SOUNDING GUITAR CAN ALLOW EXTRA WARMTH"

you will get a boomy, kicky sound from most guitars that you just don't want in your mix! When you sit in front of a guitar being played at a few metres' distance, the sound you are listening to is a mixture of sound radiated directly from the outer surfaces of the wood and out of the soundhole.

You might describe what's happening as a blending of sound coming off the soundboard, which has a relatively clear and precise tone, with the sound coming out of the soundhole which adds bass warmth and depth along with general texture or 'overtones' due to its jumbled mix of many interacting waves. It's this blend that gives us the balance of tone, or lack of it. Too much of one or another aspect can be, depending on taste, undesirable: giving either an overly clear or trebly sound or a boomy bass heavy sound. The size of the soundhole(s) is only one factor in how the balance turns out, with the flexibility of the back and front of the guitar being very important in balancing our tone: far more than small changes to a traditional soundhole diameter for instance.

One of Benjamin's own models

SHIVER ME TIMBERS

Sitting playing a traditional single soundhole guitar, we can of course hear ourselves reasonably well (and have done for hundreds of years) but in a different way to the audience sitting in front of the guitar. How a particular guitar is built can lead to very different experiences for the player and can also make an additional sideport pointing at the player more or less desirable. Sound also radiates from the back and sides of a guitar and sound goes round corners such that we can hear the soundboard and soundhole even from behind, and it can reflect back at us from walls and so on. The type of sound we hear radiated from the back and sides depends on the type of wood used and the thickness and rigidity of the sheets of wood. Relatively thick back and sides made from hard, dense and stiff timber (such as rosewood) are not able to move significantly except at higher frequencies.

The experience of playing a guitar built like this can be that it sounds relatively quieter and clearer or thinner from behind, as we are relying more on sound diffracting round from the front or reflecting from the surroundings. A guitar built with relatively thin or flexible back and sides that can move more freely will tend to radiate much more sound backwards and the sound will tend to be much fuller and more in the mid-range of frequencies.

On average, guitars with relatively solid back and sides that have less radiated sound backwards also have a tighter, more focused bass (unless they have a very free soundboard, in which case all bets are off). Adding an extra soundhole to a deep but clear sounding guitar like this can allow some extra colour and warmth and be a very positive change, especially for the player. Grit Laskin, one of the originators of the side-port, usually builds in such a style and the soundport works very well on his instruments, adding a slightly airy and more diffused quality (to my ears). Grit emphasises the use of a relatively narrow slot rather than a larger oval or round shape in order to minimise the kick exiting at certain lower frequencies and this helps address the downsides of pointing a soundhole directly at the player from close quarters.

I've played tighter back and sides guitars with much larger sideports and found it to be an uncomfortable and slightly disconcerting experience: very strong, kicky peaks exit straight at you when you hit particular notes.

I tend to use relatively thin backs and sides that radiate plenty of sound backwards and generate a lot of warm overtones, such that I can keep my soundboards relatively controlled for low tunings without losing colour and sensitivity. I've been asked a number of times to add an extra soundhole to one of my instruments. The effect was certainly to add further amounts of warm smooth coloured bass overtones: pleasing and quite dramatic. Then again, whether adding warmth and colour to an already warm and colourful sounding guitar increases intelligibility, is a matter of personal experience and taste. ■

NICK'S VERDICT

To give a definitive answer on sideports being a good or bad thing is impossible, the results depend entirely on the rest of the guitar's structure. It's best to trust your own ears when buying a ready-made guitar or trust a maker's own experience if you are ordering a custom build!

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Presenting new, interesting or alternative musicians. Listen to something different, with ***Paul Strange***

GRAINNE DUFFY

STYLE… (BLUES/AMERICANA)

I'm from County Monaghan, Ireland, and I grew up singing with my sisters in a band. We were like a rockier Corrs! I learnt guitar mostly from friends, my brother-in-law and my boyfriend (now husband) – a very patient man. Then I started writing my own songs, touring and recording two albums. I'm currently gigging in France, Germany, Ireland and the UK, and my new album, *Where I Belong*, has just been released. It was recorded in Los Angeles and produced by Justin Stanley. The title track – about finding peace and harmony in yourself – is more acoustic and roots than I usually do, but we felt something special in it. 'Blame It On You' is great to play live, 'Open Arms' is lovely in an acoustic setting, while 'Canyon Road' is a driving track. For live work I play a Gibson Les Paul Goldtop through a Fender amp, and a light-brown Takemine EAN10X semi-acoustic – with a feedback suppressor in the soundhole to help control the sound – DI'd through the PA. They are both really good, hard-working guitars, which I love. I also use the Takemine for recording and writing at home. It's a great tool for composing as it has its own resonance – it's lovely to sing with an acoustic guitar. I play both pick and fingerstyle, but mainly pick. I used to practice every day, and I feel bad saying I don't anymore, but there's a lot to juggle when music is your career. I tend to focus more on expressing my personality and life experiences in my playing, but practice is great, and I love when I get time to do it. My advice to anyone starting out? Be honest to yourself, work hard, try to respect the people around you and have fun – life is short.

www.grainneduffy.com

CRAIG BIGNELL

STYLE… (AMERICANA)

I'm a drummer/percussionist who fell in love with acoustic guitar, banjo, and acoustic music. I live on a ranch in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta, Canada, with my wife and musical partner Suzanne Levesque. Together we perform as Over The Moon. Suzanne plays upright bass and acoustic guitar and sings, while I sing and play acoustic guitar, three-finger style banjo and clawhammer banjo. Our music is Americana roots, with a bit of western swing, and our songs focus on our two-part vocal blend and the uncluttered sound of our acoustic instruments. Our debut album, *Moondancer*, is about the simple but sometimes rugged life of the Western Frontier. The title track, written by our ranching/artist neighbour Ian Tyson, is about a girl waiting for her departed lover to ride back and take her away one full moon night. 'Turtle Mountain', my favourite track, tells the story of a disaster that happened very close to us. Suzanne's vocal has the power to make you feel that fateful night of so long ago. Most of our songs are written on acoustic guitar – sometimes the melody and chord progression come first, other times it's the story. My regular guitar is a natural-coloured Lowden acoustic S10. It was one of the models that they had Eastman make for them in 1985. It inspires me and makes our wee duo sound huge. I use an LR Baggs Venue DI out to the PA and a Fishman Loudbox Performer for my stage sound. I also play a Deering 30th Anniversary Tenbrooks as my bluegrass banjo, a Jason Romero openback for clawhammer and a Gold Tone CB5 for my cello banjo. As far as drums and percussion go, there's too much to mention. We're currently recording our next album and playing live shows.

www.overthemoonband.com

STEVE RODGERS

STYLE… (POP/BLUES/FOLK)

Currently based in California, I'm a singer-songwriter and the son of Paul Rodgers, singer with Free and Bad Company. I taught myself guitar with a Beatles book that had tab, then I learnt the blues and had some lessons. I've learnt a lot by watching how my father works, and he's always there if I have any questions. I've released an EP, *I Will Grow*, and the title track is also out as a single. The song is about life being a journey that can knock us over many times, but in the end, each battle and victory makes us grow. A hopeful, empowering message that we can grow, we can overcome, it's also on my debut album, produced by Ken Nelson and mixed by Adrian Bushby, coming out around now. Is there a theme? Yes. Life. It happens to all of us, no matter who we are. The songs reflect pain, love, joy and hope. How do I write my songs? Strum away and sing until an idea comes. From there I get a melody and then I write the words. Occasionally I have the words first and then write the music. My stage guitar is a blue Yamaha APX900 small-bodied acoustic/electric, DI'd through the PA. It's easy to play and I've written many songs with it. For recording, I also use an orange 1980s PRS electric guitar, tuned to E, which goes through a Boss digital delay pedal. I mostly pick, but also play fingerstyle. I also play the piano and a half-size classical guitar. I'm currently writing for the next album, plus tours in the UK, US, Japan and Europe. I'll be performing in the UK in the autumn. My best tip for success in the music business? Find a great manager and build yourself a team.

www.steverodgersmusic.com

JARROD DICKENSON

STYLE… (AMERICANA)

Originally from Waco, Texas, I'm 31 years old, and live with my wife in Nashville. I began playing guitar at the relatively late age of 18 – I took a handful of lessons when I first started out, but I'm largely self-taught. I've recorded three albums and two EPs, toured virtually non-stop for the last six or so years and have had the privilege of supporting legends such as Bonnie Raitt, Don McLean, The Waterboys and Jools Holland. I'm currently planning tours in the US, Europe and the UK, and my new album, *Ready The Horses*, has just been released. It has no specific theme – it's more a collection of songs and stories that I've written over the past few years. My favourite track? I'd say 'Way Past Midnight', my own humble attempt at doing something Ray Charles-esque. I'm not sure if we achieved that goal, but we had an absolute blast recording it. My main acoustic guitar is a 2008 Collings OM1-Mh. It's an orchestra-sized guitar, with mahogany back, sides and top and an LR Baggs Element pickup. It's a workhorse, and accompanies me everywhere. It sounds great mic'd up, and surprisingly good with just a DI. It's dependable on the road, and just keeps sounding better the more I beat it up. The mahogany top makes for an interesting, warm, woody sound that I don't think you get with many spruce-topped guitars. I don't use any effects. Pretty much every song I've ever written has been composed on an acoustic guitar, at least in the earliest stages. Each song comes to life in a different way. Anything and everything can inspire a song. It's all about the story for me.

www.jarroddickenson.com

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We've been busy this summer giving our guitar floor a makeover and it's never been a better time to visit!

Included in the photo are our new displays of Moon guitars - handmade in Glasgow - and our Guilds including the new US made M-20 and D-20. In the background are our lovely Auden acoustics which were recently demoed for our Youtube channel

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MISSISSIPPI JOHN HURT

LIVE AT OBERLIN COLLEGE ★★★★☆

WWW.WIENERWORLD.COM

Recorded in 1965 before a rapturous audience, John Hurt's music became a seminal influence on the likes of Jansch, Renbourn and McTell. Unlike some of his rediscovered contemporaries like Skip James, Hurt's music was instantly accessible, eagerly lapped up by white listeners, thinking they were risqué for liking blues music, but unable to cope with tales of the devil, and women stretched out on hospital 'cooling boards'. All Hurt's hits are here, 'Candy Man', 'My Creole Belle' and more. A collection of wonderful songs played by an undoubted master. **JP**

CARLA BRUNI

FRENCH TOUCH ★★★☆☆

CARLABRUNI.LNK.TO/FRENCHTOUCH

Super model makes album. Sound familiar? The difference being that Carla Bruni is very much an ex supermodel. A great singer, she's played guitar since she was a kid. As the title suggests, she may be Italian, but there's a very French feel about the proceedings, Carla's dreamy voice on Ketty Lester's 'Love Letters', conjuring visions of Gauloise-smoked late night assignations. But that's about as predictable as it gets. The choice of material, which includes an imaginative funky take of AC/DC 's 'Highway To Hell' and the Clash's 'Jimmy Jazz', is mind-boggling. And just for good measure there's even a sultry version of the Stones 'Miss You'. Eat your heart out Mick. **JP**

BRUCE COCKBURN

BONE TO BONE ★★★☆☆

WWW.BRUCECOCKBURN.COM

It's been 6 years since Canadian Bruce Cockburn's last record, during which time he wrote his autobiography, a feat he admits left him creatively bereft. He's now hooked up with Nashville producer Colin Linden, using a stripped-down rhythm section and creating a great organic live feel to the tracks. From the folky grandeur of 'Forty Years In The Wilderness', to the Fleetwood Mac-esque 'States I'm In', Cockburn's fingerpicked Dobro playing is a joy. Linden's influence pops up on the tremolo-laden swamp vibe of 'Café Society', and Cockburn's uplifting take of the gospel 'Twelve Gates To The City', proves he's shaken off any creative dust. **JP**

WILDWOOD KIN

TURNING TIDES ★★½☆☆

WWW.WILDWOODKIN.COM

Wildwood Kin are a trio of young Devon women (sisters Beth and Emilie Key, on bouzouki and guitar alongside their cousin, Meghann Loney on drums) who, after adding ethereal harmonies to Seth Lakeman's last album to great acclaim, have presumably reached a crucial point in their career, deciding stadiums are where it's at, rather than folk clubs. So it's all rather perplexing. Thundering drums introduce 'Run', fading out to allow the girls' harmonies to breathe, but they're back in force for 'Warrior Daughter', and the electronic-drenched tracks that follow. It's an over-produced nightmare – raw talent compromised by OTT production. They can do better! **JP**

WILLIE WATSON

FOLKSINGER VOL. 2 ★★★☆☆

WWW.WILLIEWATSON.COM

This founding member of the Old Crow Medicine Show seems hell bent on continuing his one person crusade to acquaint audiences with the back pages of American folk music. On one hand it's a bit weird – after all, financially, what would motivate you to do this? His PRS cheque isn't going to be up to much. But on the other it's very laudable. And to his credit Willie makes a good fist of it, singing in his keening voice like he's just crawled out of an Appalachian hooch house. Recorded by retro master David Rawlings, the more obvious anthems like 'Cuckoo Bird' jostle alongside Arthur Crudup's 'When My Baby Left Me', and dusty Leadbelly epics. In a world of musical flim flam, we need this man. **JP**

ADRIAN & MEREDITH

MORE THAN A LITTLE ★★★☆☆

WWW.ADRIANKRYGOWSKI.COM

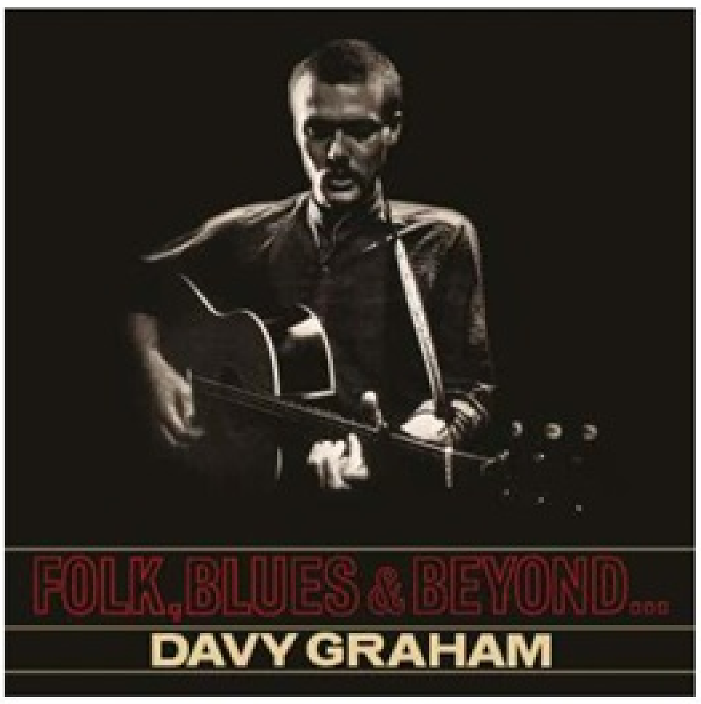
In a city filled with country cowboys and sit-on-stool songwriters, Adrian and Meredith's claim to concoct 'a different sort of roots racket', is word perfect. Hailing from the simmering creative swamp of East Nashville, with players like Fats Kaplin from Jack White's band and Paul Niehaus on pedal steel on hand, the pair create the kind of glorious controlled mayhem, that would do the Pogues justice. Meredith dishes out warp speed fiddling to the sizzling 'Greasy Coat and Kitchen Girl', Adrian barking out the lyrics like he's taking part in an old time Medicine Show. An album that never pauses for breath, this pair sound like they're on a roll. **JP**

ASSEMBLY LANE

NORTHBOUND ★★★☆☆

WWW.ASSEMBLYLANE.BANDCAMP.COM

Four young Newcastle-based musicians – Matthew Ord guitar, Niles Krieger on fiddle, Tom Kimber on mandolin, and Bevan Morris on bass – Assembly Lane fuse British and American folk music. Their sympathetic treatment of an old clinker like 'Sir Patrick Spens', checking an unlikely musical bedfellow next to the bluegrass romp of 'Road To Columbus'. The combination of Kimber's sizzling mandolin and Krieger's fiddle is a winner on the bluegrass outings, but as schooled as they clearly are on the folk end of the spectrum, it's on the sad haunting 'Hills Of Mexico', and 'Ain't No More Cain' that the band really shine, constructing lo fi cinematic pieces relying on their collective input. **JP**



DAVEY GRAHAM

FOLK BLUES & BEYOND ★★★★★

WWW.DAVEYGRAHAM.MOONFRUIT.COM

With the release of this album over half a century ago, in its own quiet way, the music of Davey Graham was as groundbreaking as that of Charlie Parker, Robert Johnson or Jimi Hendrix. From the chiming harmonics and sitar-like runs on 'Leaving Blues', to his hard bop flourishes on Art Blakey's 'Moanin', no one had played like this before, let alone tried to combine so many disparate influences. He was an enormous influence on everyone from Jimmy Page to Bert Jansch, and his instrumental 'Anji', an essential rite of passage for any budding acoustic guitarist. And it sounds as good today as it did then – an essential purchase. **JP**

AMANDA ANNE PLATT & THE HONEYCUTTERS

SELF TITLED ★★★★☆

WWW.HONEYCUTTERS.COM

"We don't have a TV because the news is always bad, and it teaches us to want all the things we never had," Platt sings on 'Eden', a paean to an idealised place of sanctuary out in the boondocks of North Carolina. Five albums in, this outfit just keeps getting better. At the heart is Platt's gorgeous old school country voice, weaving in and out of her band's cracking arrangements, one moment country confessional, the next recalling Rikki Lee Jones. She's ploughing a well-trodden furrow, but her heartfelt songs put her way ahead of the pack. **JP**

CHARLIE PARR

DOG ★★★☆☆

WWW.CHARLIEPARR.COM

The one thing you always know about Charlie Parr is that you never know what he's going to pull out of the bag next. Always one of the most refreshingly honest performers around, a man with nowhere to hide, it's still a shock to hear this quiet Minnesota native readily owning up to his depressive tendencies. 'How do you know I don't have a soul?' he sings on 'Dog', an ode to his beloved mutt. But as world-weary as he sounds, his feral John Fahey-influenced steel guitar playing still rings out like a hammer, on an album bursting with twisted intriguing songs keeping his darkness at bay. **JP**

THE TEXAS GENTLEMEN

TX JELLY ★★★☆☆

WWW.THETEXASGENTLEMEN.COM

The UK recording industry has never nurtured superb 'house bands' like Booker T & the MGs or the Wrecking Crew, outfits able to turn their hand to backing up whatever turned up at the studio any particular morning. The Texas Gentlemen – the core quintet being Beau Bedford, Nik Lee, Daniel Creamer, Matt McDonald and Ryan Ake – are yet another such outfit, an all-purpose backing band who've worked with Leon Bridges and Kris Kristofferson, holed up in the legendary Fame studio for 96 hours. There's nothing they can't pull off, and from the weepy Willie Nelson feel of 'Dream Along' to the New Orleans funk of 'Habbie Doobie', these guys had a ball proving it. **JP**

KEV MINNEY

STORIES OF THE SKY ★★★☆☆

WWW.KEVMINNEY.COM

Inspired by a new found interest in astronomy, the debut album from Kev Minney finds him plumbing the depths of the cosmos. Underpinned by his fine acoustic guitar playing, for the most part it's a light, dreamy journey, a journey that becomes hypnotic on tracks like the understated 'Gravity' and 'Just Another Day', Kev's gentle vocals and rolling guitar arpeggios inevitably recalling Nick Drake. An army of musicians were involved with the recording, but you'd never know it; the sparingly-applied shimmering strings and percussion, never threaten to swamp the feather light arrangements. An acoustic album of much beauty and simplicity. **JP**

CHRIS JAGGER

ALL THE BEST ★★★☆☆

WWW.CHRISJAGGERONLINE.COM

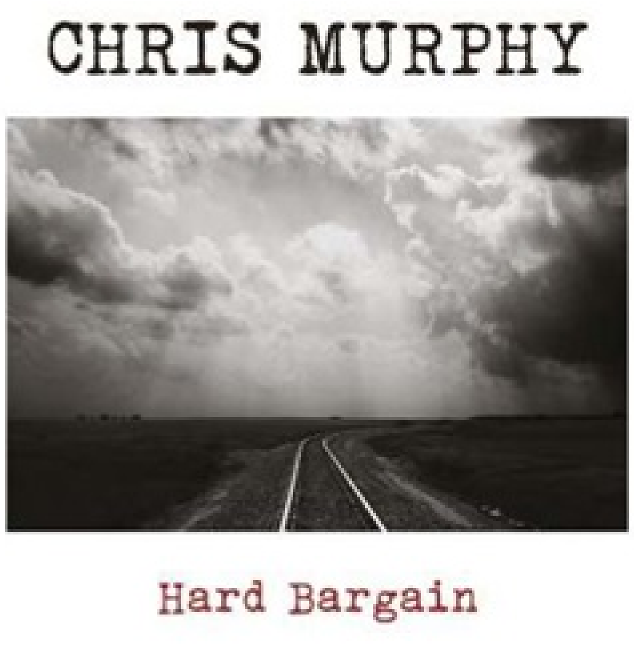
It can't have been easy being Chris Jagger. Nepotism is not something we easily embrace, so all power to Mick's younger brother. Since his first album hit the shelves back in the 70s, he's been turning out jumping roots music, with an admirable 'devil take the hindmost attitude'. And this retrospective is full of gems, everything from the raunchy 'Avalon Girls', the acoustic 'Concertina Jack' with Mick shouting along, to the bluesy 'Junkman' with David Gilmour's sparse guitar licks. Just for good measure the album comes with a DVD of Chris hanging out backstage at a Stones concert in Austin, with the venerable Pinetop Perkins. Rocking – as they say. **JP**

STEVE MARTIN AND THE STEEP CANYON RANGERS

THE LONG AWAITED ALBUM ★★★☆☆

WWW.STEVEMARTIN.COM

Comedy and music are uneasy bedfellows. But there's nothing comedic about Steve Martin's banjo playing: it's seriously good. Of course humour's never far away, with his stop/go rant 'Caroline', imploring 'If you find another, please don't put a page on Facebook', and the tongue in cheek 'Bad Night', would make you weep if it weren't so funny. Elsewhere Steve gets serious, his clattering Appalachian banjo to the fore on 'So Familiar', as the Rangers step up the gas. If bluegrass isn't your thing – and for many it's not – then forget labels and think again. **JP**



CHRIS MURPHY

HARD BARGAIN ★★★★☆

WWW.CHRISMURPHYMUSIC.COM

A live album by a guy with just a fiddle and a stage to use as a stompbox sounds like a potential trainwreck, but Chris Murphy's in a field of one. Inevitably we get a vigorous Irish jig or two, the eight-minute 'Caves Of Killala' a mammoth piece beginning with long echoing glissandos before the piece morphs into a frenetic workout. But it's the unexpected that makes this so special. Chris sings using the fiddle as a vamping machine, interspersing his rhythms with lightning fast fills, and the mesmeric hoedown 'Holcombe Creek' and the bluesy 'Trust' with its 12-bar changes, will stop you in your tracks. There's a lot of magic at work, and not a mirror to be seen. **JP**

JULIE FOWLIS

ALTERUM ★★★★☆

WWW.JULIEFOWLIS.COM

An expressionless Julie Fowlis stares blankly from 'Alterum', head crowned by what appears to be an abandoned Sea Eagle's nest, a madcap heap of feathers. Like her hat, Ms Fowlis's success as the pre-eminent Gaelic singer is truly extraordinary, and proof that great music transcends the limitations of language. When she's not singing in Gaelic, her ethereal vocals conjuring visions of the endless wild seascapes of her native Hebrides, she tackles Anne Brigg's gentle 'Go Your Way', and is bravely joined by Mary Chapin Carpenter also singing in Gaelic for 'A Phiuthrag's A Phiuthar'. What it's about is anyone's guess, but the beauty is almost unworldly. **JP**

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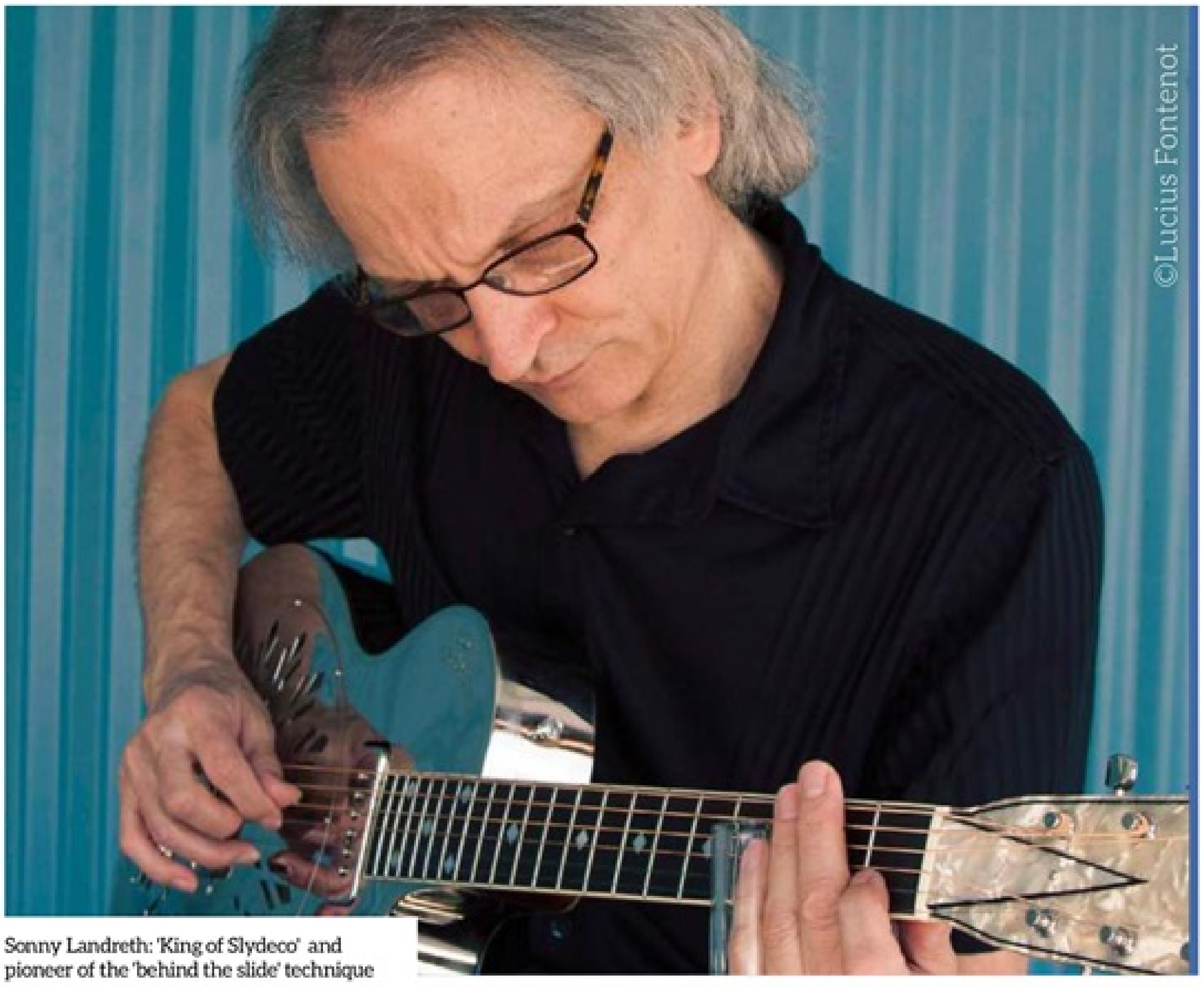
FRETTING BEHIND THE SLIDE PART 2

Chris continues his Landreth-inspired series – this month moving to open tunings

In my previous column, I introduced the Sonny Landreth bottleneck technique of fretting behind the slide. I started this series in standard tuning but now it's time to use an open tuning. This month is Dm (the saddest of all keys, according to Spinal Tap!)

From low to high it's DADFAD. I suggest using heavier strings than you normally would for standard tuning, a set of .13s or .14s perhaps. I don't recommend using a plectrum at this learning stage, as they can prevent string muting/damping which is so important for achieving a clean technique, you'll have more control if you fingerpick. Hopefully you're comfortable wearing the slide on finger 4, with a snug fit to avoid any wobbling. Diamond Bottlenecks, based in the West Midlands, make beautiful custom glass slides and will take your measurements over the phone to guarantee a good fit!

Note, if your acoustic guitar's neck joins the body at fret 12, you may find this exercise more challenging than if you played it on a guitar with 14 frets to body, which allows more room to fret behind the slide. The thumb steadies your hand and is more crucial than ever when fretting behind, as your LH fingers will not be used to anchor your hand as much compared to traditional technique.



Sonny Landreth: 'King of Slydeco' and pioneer of the 'behind the slide' technique

"The thumb steadies your hand and is more crucial than ever when fretting behind"

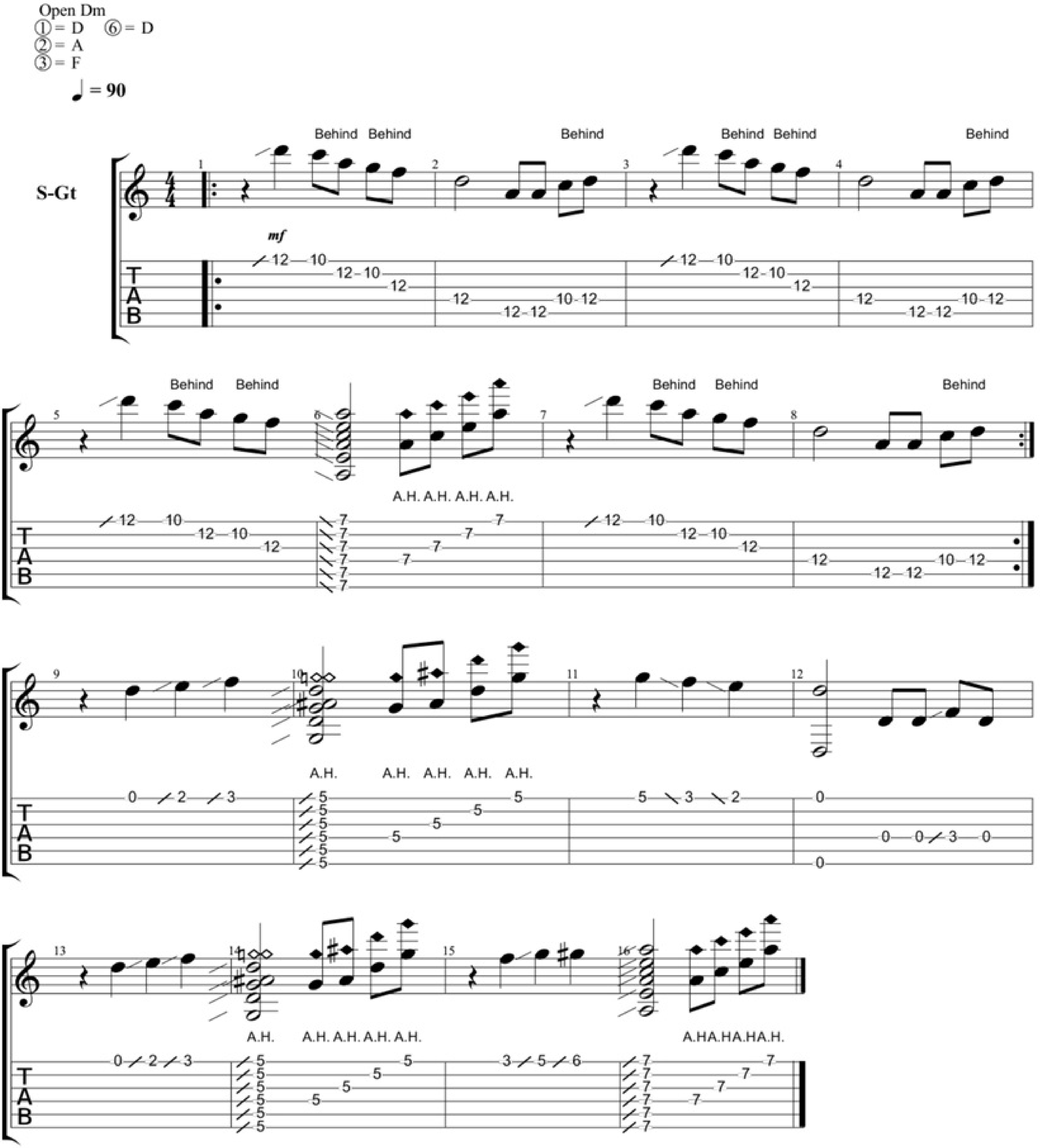
FRETTING AND PICKING BEHIND THE SLIDE

As well as fretting the strings behind the slide, using LH fingers, Sonny Landreth also invented the wonderful sound effect of picking strings behind the slide using your RH thumb (nail). With a lot of practice this is also possible using your LH 1st finger. The sound it produces is best described as an ethereal shimmer. It's only possible at frets 12, 7 and 5 using the overtones, ghost notes and harmonics that exist there. You need to keep the slide completely upright across all six strings and be spot-on with your intonation, so it's a great exercise for improving this. Then reach over with your RH thumb and gently strum/pick the strings, while keeping the slide steady at fret 12, 7 or 5. Fret 5 is the hardest of the three. In my notation, picking behind is shown as AH (artificial harmonic). Simply playing vibrato across all six strings at fret 12, when tuned to an open chord, provides a fantastic sound, a kind of keyboard 'pad' to play melodies over. Then adding some notes picked behind the slide creates another layer. In open Dm it obviously sounds quite mysterious and spooky. If you own a loop pedal, it's easy to build up textures and layers to then solo over. Great fun and a really good way of working on your intonation, as the notes will only ring out if you're exactly over the fret.

Having advised you of the importance of good string muting, this month's piece doesn't actually require that much. Contrary to traditional bottleneck technique, it's all about utilising the overtones behind the slide instead of muting them out with your RH and LH fingers. So, don't block the strings with your picking hand and try to keep the slide covering all six strings, allowing them to sound while you pick the melody within the chord. When comfortable, try adding some vibrato to the slide, but not too much as it will detract from your intonation. Finger stretching is important to avoid aches and pains if you're wearing the slide for a long time.

For a feel/rhythm reference, think 'Black Magic Woman' by Fleetwood Mac. I'll post a video demo on my Instagram page (@ mrchriseaton), which you can link to from my website. Have fun! ■

EXAMPLE - FRETTING BEHIND THE SLIDE



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FULL TAB ONLINE

This month Daniel moves his ukulele journey from Hawaii to Inner Mongolia

The 'ukulele is an instrument that I would take with me just about anywhere. I play it in the car on long road trips, on the plane, train, at happy hour (I snack with my right hand to avoid getting the fretboard and neck greasy). I've even practiced at night while inline skating on a tennis court! It's far more enjoyable to get your "ten-thousand-hours-to-greatness" in when you are walking around the yard or enjoying a sunset at the beach. A few years ago, I decided to see how far I could go with this concept of portability and set out to explore our world... in song.

In search of unique collaborations, my travels brought me to Inner Mongolia where I had the distinguished honor of recording with The Grasslands Ensemble. This talented group of musicians and vocalists represent a diversity of ethnicities: Mongolian, Manchurian, Evenk, Daur, Russian, and Han Chinese.

The title track of our album, *Between the Sky & Prairie*, is a pioneering cultural and musical exchange, as it's the first collaboration between a 'ukulele, chaoer – a lower-pitched predecessor to the horse head fiddle – and vocal melodies in the Mongolian style.

I wrote this piece while riding through the grasslands of Inner Mongolia on horses (an SUV powered by hundreds of horses, that is). In awe as we drove through an endless expanse of blue and green, I strummed a G major chord. 'G' for grasslands. OK, it's a start. I wondered to myself if there was a musical way to capture my feelings at that moment – peaceful, excited, and grateful for this gift of music, which had somehow brought me to this majestic land only a stone's throw from Russia.

EXAMPLE 1

I came up with a melodic theme that gently rippled, like the rolling hills of the steppe. In the example below, the melody is designated with long accent marks.

EXAMPLE 2

To create an intro, I took the melodic theme and stretched it out over time. This compositional technique is called augmentation. I also transposed the theme down an octave so when the melody appears after the eight-bar introduction, it is the first time the listener will hear it in that register. The theme, presented down an octave in augmentation, is highlighted in blue.

EXAMPLE 3

In contrast to the mountainous terrain of the Hawaiian Islands, the Mongolian sky and prairie meet on a fairly straight horizon.

To musically portray the evenness of the sky and prairie, I wanted minimal melodic movement, if any at all. Pedal points seemed to be an ideal way to achieve this. A pedal point is a low sustained note over which a passage is played. An inverted pedal point is a high, sustained note or group of notes under which a passage is played. In the introduction, the notes highlighted in orange are an inverted pedal point I used to represent the sky.

EXAMPLE 4

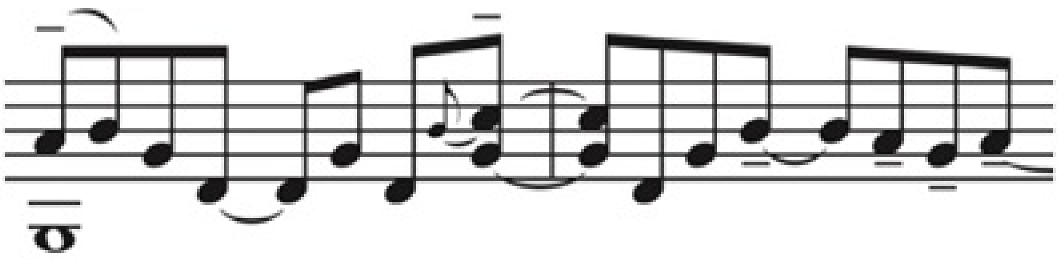
In the verse, I used a pedal point on the open low G string, highlighted in green, to illustrate the grasslands. Remember, "G is for Grasslands?" Functionally, this key was strategically chosen to make the best use of the open low G string as a pedal tone.

Upon first impression, an instrumental piece and its title may not always have the most obvious connection. Though if you study it carefully enough, you might uncover the composer's intent or even find your own personal meaning in the music. 'Between The Sky & Prairie' depicts the perspective of a world traveling 'ukulele that has the fortune of sharing a medium with old but new, foreign yet familiar, horizon-expanding friends. It evokes imagery of a most beautiful place on earth.

Thanks to Han Mou Ren (chaoer), Qiqigema (vocals) and Aqitu (Mongolian drum, shaker bells). ■

'Between the Sky & Prairie' is the title track of The Grasslands Ensemble & Daniel Ho's new album. Available on iTunes and at www.DanielHo.com

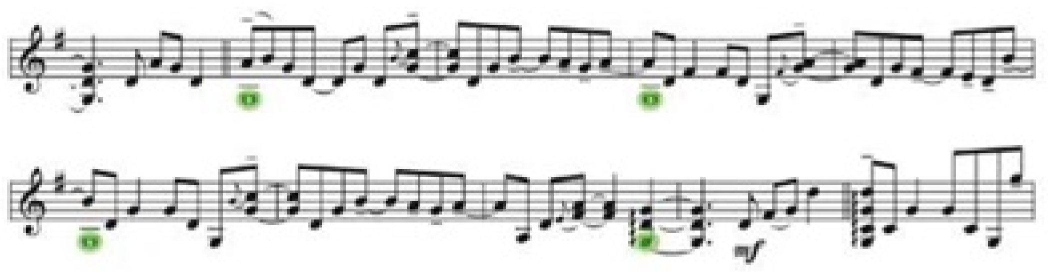
EXAMPLE 1



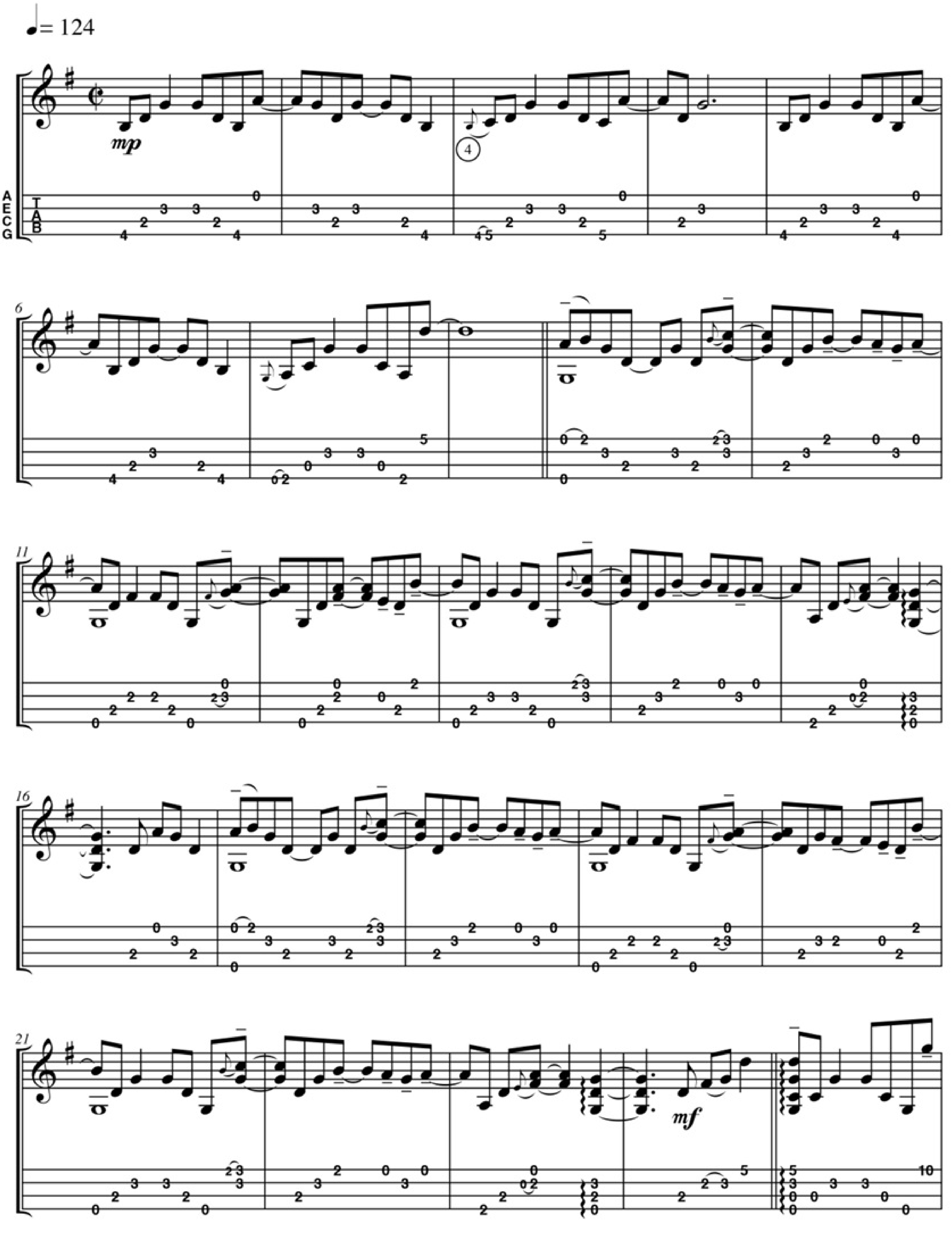
EXAMPLE 2

EXAMPLE 3

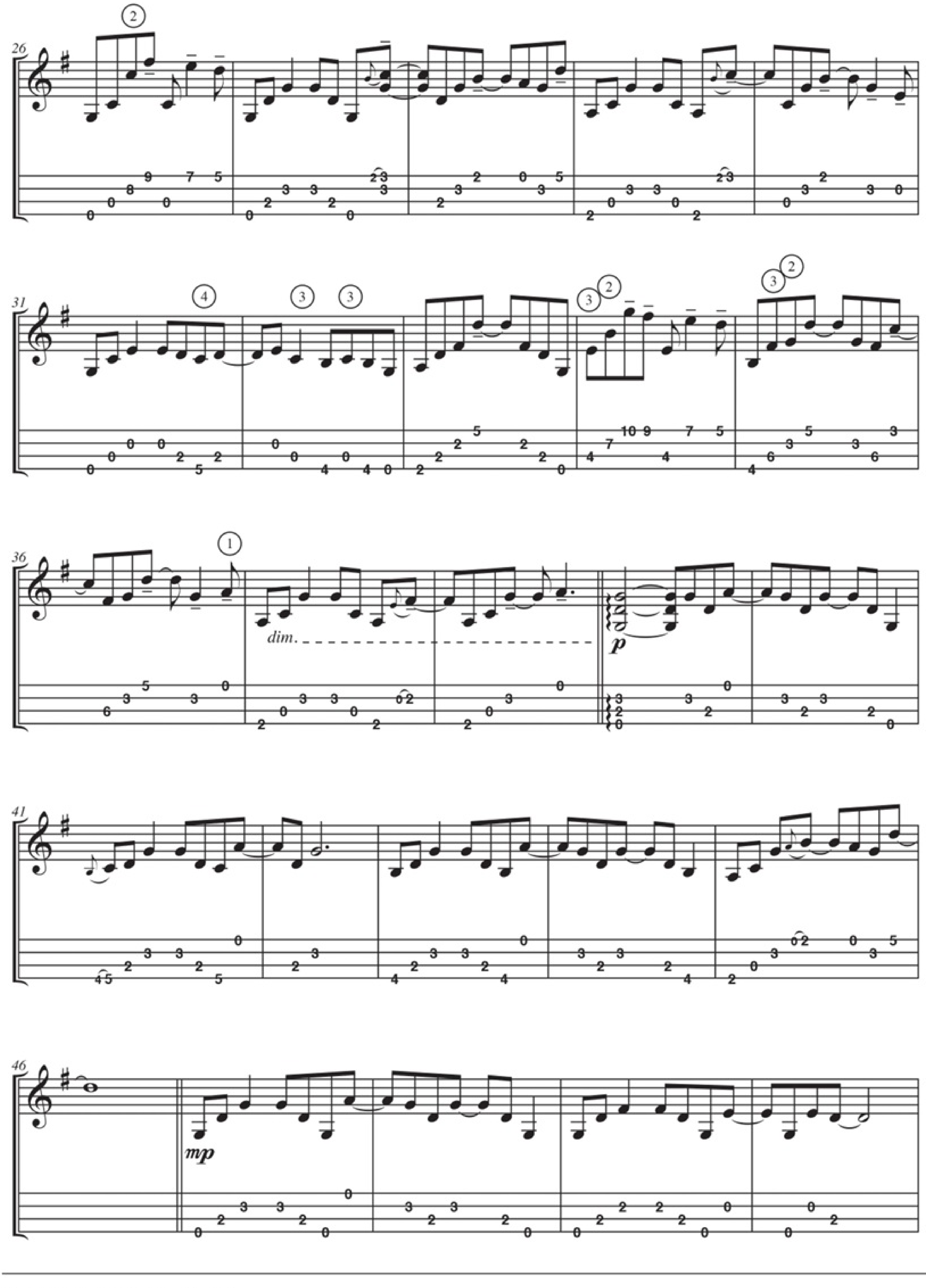
EXAMPLE 4



'BETWEEN THE SKY & PRAIRIE'



'BETWEEN THE SKY & PRAIRIE' CONTINUED



THOMAS LEEB FINGERSTYLE VIRTUOSO

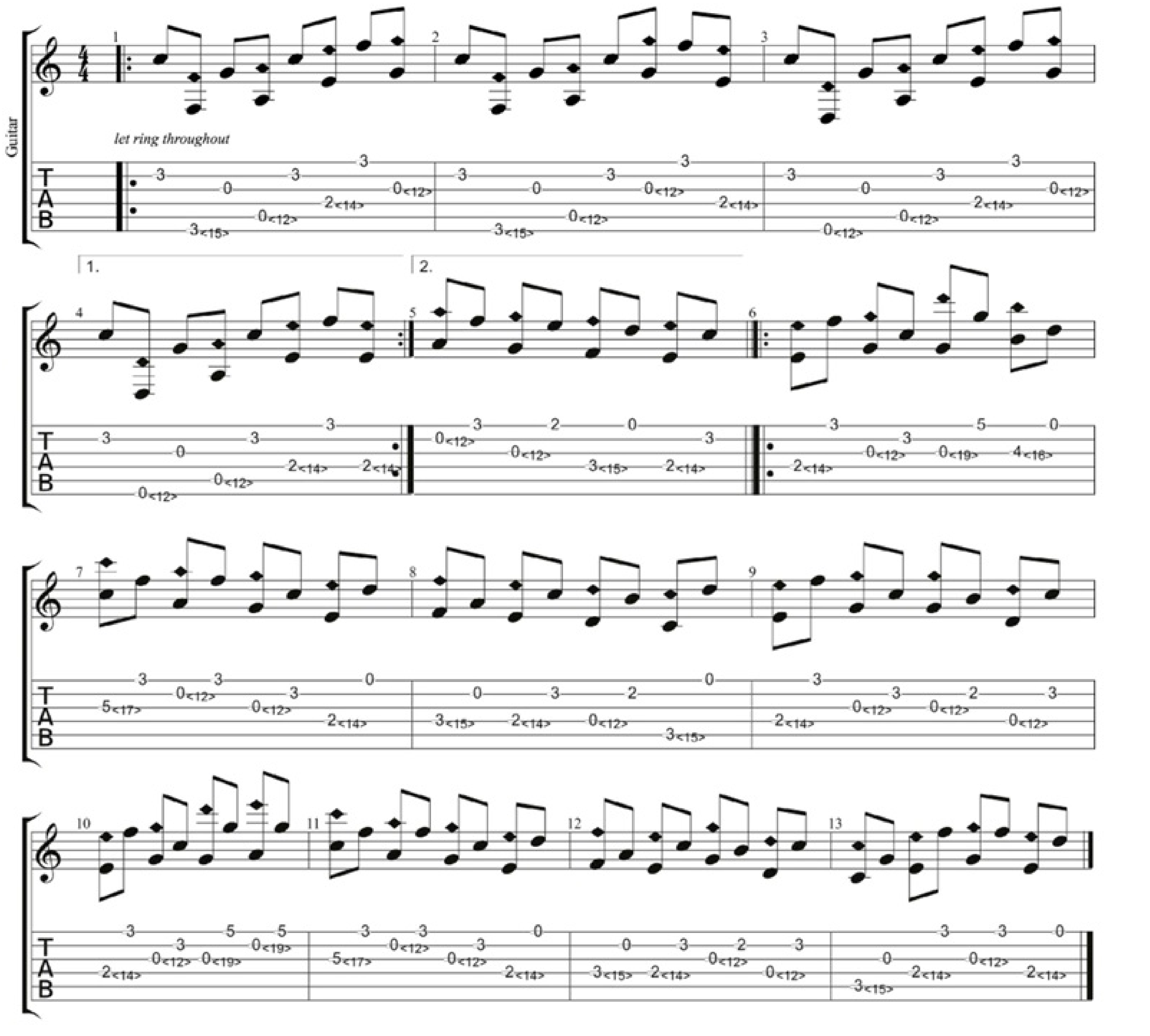
'ASHA'

Leeb introduces a harmonics-based piece with a lot of heart

This one's really special to me – I wrote it in my head while carrying my daughter Asha around the first day of her life. It took a while to translate to guitar but the work was worth it! We covered a primer to this piece in early 2016, but we will touch on the basics here as well. The entire piece consists of one technique: a back and forth between a thumb-pinched harmonic on a bass string and a note plucked by your little finger. The harmonics are produced by holding your index finger over the indicated node point while picking the string with your right-hand thumb. Ignore your left hand at first and just focus on the right. To play a harmonic with only your right hand, touch the node point on fret 12 lightly with your right hand index finger and then pick with your right thumb (that's the open string next to the number in brackets). This is one of the more challenging tricks to learn, so take your time. Tip: a bit of thumbnail helps.

Try to get a good balance between the harmonic and the strings you pick with your little finger: one shouldn't be much louder or present than the other. The intro should be in your fingers quickly but you will probably hit a brick wall with bars 6 and 7. There's not much I can tell you that will make this phrase easier except to take your time and find an efficient left-hand fingering. We will continue the bridge parts of this in another column. Enjoy! ■

'ASHA'



CLIVE CARROLL ACOUSTIC VIRTUOSO

'THE EARLE OF SALISBURY'

Carroll presents an Olde English number featuring some 'Renbourn harmonics'

'The Earle of Salisbury' was composed by the English Renaissance composer William Byrd (c.1540-1623). Byrd wrote it in memory of Robert Cecil, the 1st Earl of Salisbury, who died on 24 May 1612. This piece is a pavan — a stately, processional 16th century dance that is in either 2/2 or 4/4 time. On occasion a tabor, which is a drum played with one stick, would sound on the quarter beats 1, 3 and 4.

'The Earle of Salisbury' has been a staple in the classical guitar repertoire for many years but I first heard and played it when I was on the road with John Renbourn. It appears as the first track on his 1968 album, *Sir John Alot of Merrie Englandes Musyk Thyng & Ye Grene Knyghte* and features glockenspiel.

Unusually, this pavan is in two sections rather than the normal three and Byrd did not include variations on the repeats in the score that was published during his lifetime.

In the arrangement printed here, the first section runs from bars 1 to 8 and the second section from bars 9 to 16. There is an upper, middle and lower voice and counterpoint features throughout.

Prominence should be given to the upper part in bars 1 to 4. Within bars 5 to 8, the middle line responds, or imitates, the upper melody in terms of rhythmic and melodic direction. Practice slowly to allow time to listen to everything that is going on. Once the picture is clear in your mind, the musical voice separation will come through. I like to separate the upper and middle voices a little further by contrasting the tone with use of tasto (plucking closer to the fretboard) and ponticello (plucking closer to the saddle).

> **"If you're confident about what you want to hear, you'll play it that way"**

Section 2 starts with a phrase beginning on the upbeat at the end of bar 8 and runs through to bar 9, beat 3. This phrase is then sounded one octave higher and includes some 'Renbourn' harmonics at fret 12. In bar 13, John Renbourn sometimes syncopated the high D and high E. You might like to check out the various versions on YouTube to hear what I mean. Perhaps a nice idea might be to play bar 13 straight the first time, and syncopate this melody on the repeat.

Left-hand fingerings are marked and rhythmic durations are a little clearer in the staff notation. However, once you have memorised the piece you might like to detach some notes to create a slightly staccato and 'stately' feel.

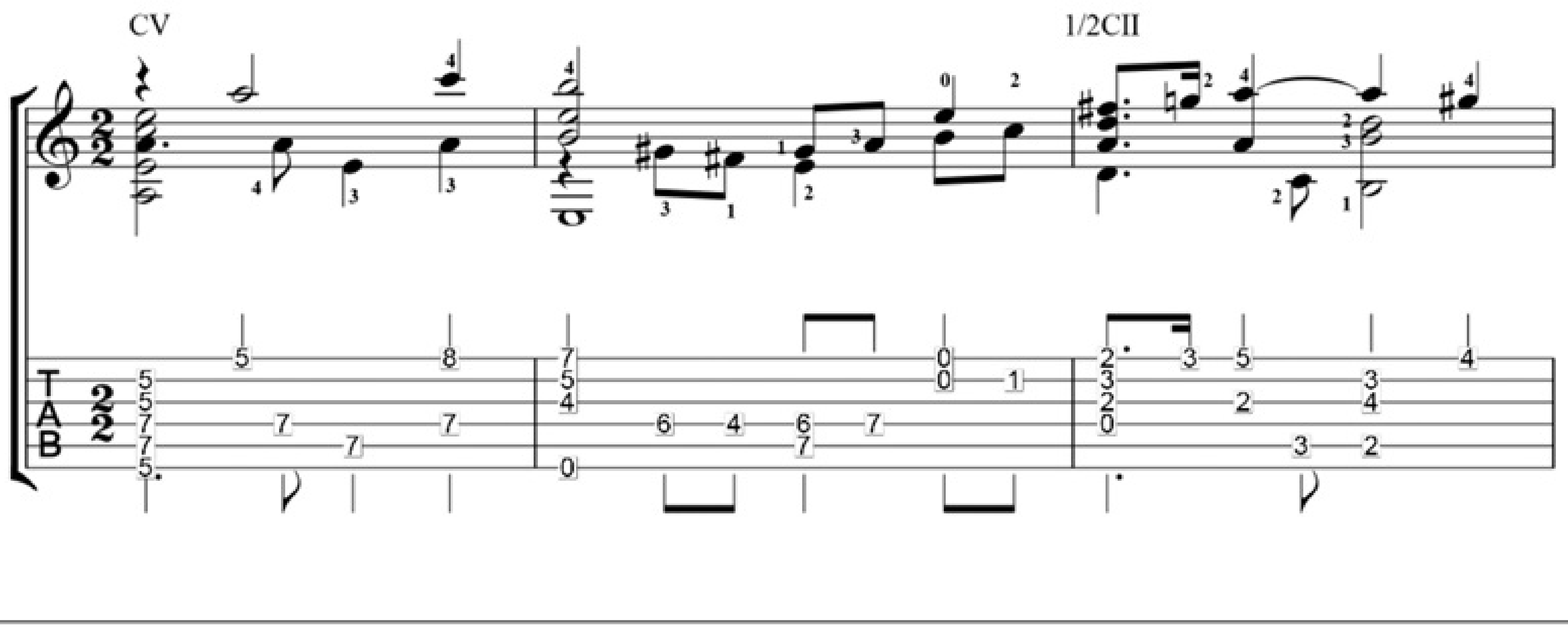
I find the most technically challenging phrase to be at bar 15 where a barre chord at fret 7 is then followed by fingers 2 and 4 on strings 2 and 3. Finger 3 then plays the C on string 4 before moving down a fret to the note B. The upper melody meanwhile, is the A on string 2 which then slides down to a fret 9 G# with finger 4. Practice slowly (!) ensuring that along with all the usual technical aspects, attention is also given to intonation.

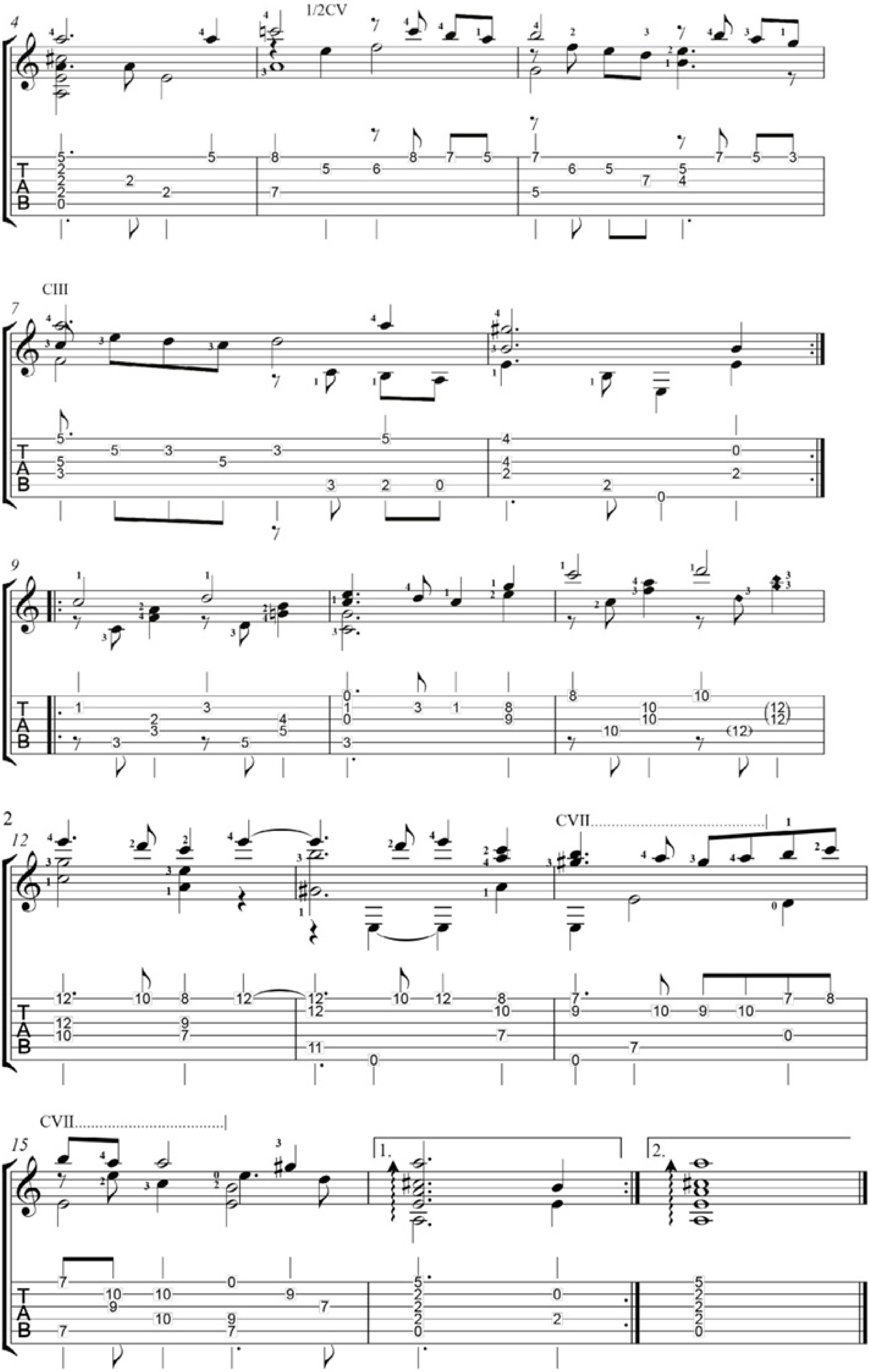
Generally speaking, barre chords require a little more pressure with the fretting hand and as a result, could disrupt the rhythmic flow of any piece you play. Listening to this aspect is key. As always, if you are confident about what you want to hear— in this case the rhythmic flow through barre-chord sections — you will automatically play it that way. Easier said than done though, I know! But cracking it is part of the fun.

I have recorded a version to accompany this article, which you can hear by visiting https://goo.gl/rz3hwP. ■

'THE EARLE OF SALISBURY'

EADGBE




1/2CV
CIII
CVII
CVII
1.
2.

LEON HUNT UK BANJO EXPERT

'GRANDFATHER'S CLOCK'

Hunt leads us through one of the most popular bluegrass banjo standards, which is an excellent choice for improving your technique

When I began playing the banjo back in the late 80s, 'Grandfather's Clock' was one of the most popular standards. Written by American composer – and antislavery activist – Henry Clay Work in 1876, it is an excellent vehicle for technique.

The first section starts with a classic bluegrass 'kick off'. The phrasing of this will set the tone for the rest of the tune. Played correctly, it will say "Woohoo, here we go". Played with the wrong phasing, it'll be a yawning "Ah well… here we go".

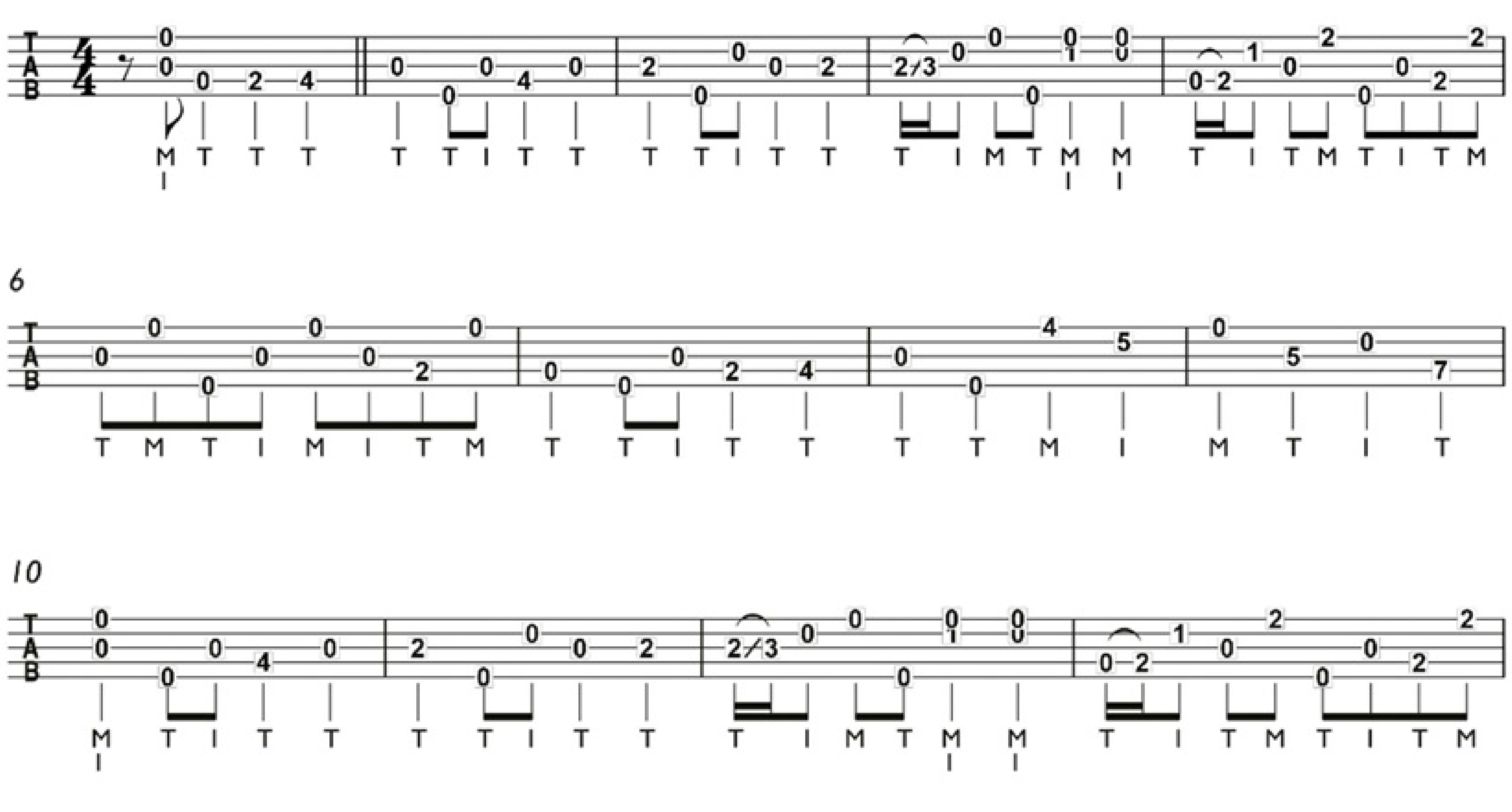
For the body of the tune, I've adopted a technique I call 'skipping'; useful when you want to convey a simple melody. Bluegrass banjo, being a three-fingered technique, can sometimes over-complicate lines that should remain simple.

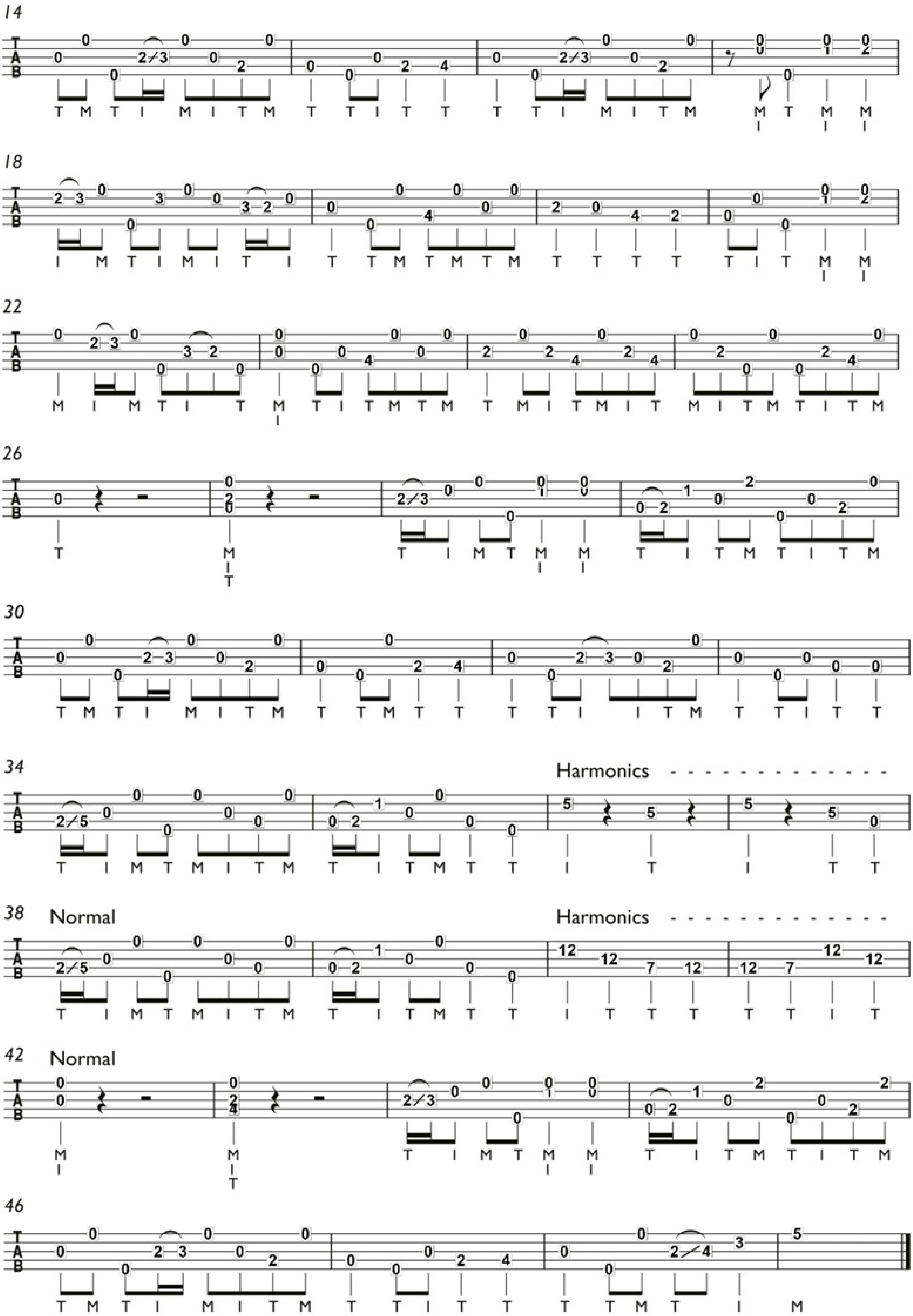
The opening two bars of 'Grandfather's Clock' are a perfect example of this. Skipping simply means to play the strong melody notes with the thumb while filling in the long gaps by playing string 5 with the thumb (after an eighth note rest) and then one of the other strings with your index or middle finger. The effect and rhythm achieved is not dissimilar to 'clawhammer' or 'frailing' banjo. The passages of 'skipping' are then joined together with some choice 'Scruggs style' banjo licks that keep things interesting and stylistically correct. This creates a good balance between serving the tune while also serving the bluegrass banjo sound. In bars 7 and 8 there is a textbook descending 'melodic' or 'Keith' style G major scale. This is the first of the clock chime effects embedded into this arrangement.

The second section (bar 17) starts with another classic bluegrass 'kick-off'. If I had to give these 'kick-offs' number identifications, this one would probably have to be #1, as it's almost certainly the most well known of them all. In terms of phrasing, exactly the same applies as with the first section – serving as musical statements of intent. As such, they must be strong and driving. There are long rests towards the end of this section (bars 26 and 27) – do not to rush these!

The third section is particularly fun as it has the tune's trademark harmonics, to simulate the clock's chimes. Harmonics are easy enough to do, but getting them to really ring out might take some practice. The main harmonics on fretted instruments occur at frets 5, 7 and 12. The trick is to lightly touch the string, without pressing it to the fingerboard, directly above the fret. The lighter you touch the string, the less of the fleshy pad of your finger will compress and spread out across the string. This will provide a more accurate and 'bell-like' harmonic. For the first set of harmonics (bars 36 and 37) this should be fairly straightforward. The second set of harmonics (bars 40 and 41) simulate the classic 'Westminster Quarters' clock chime and require a quick movement back and forth from frets 12 to 7. Getting the requisite accuracy at speed may prove slightly more challenging. ■

'GRANDFATHER'S CLOCK'




14
18
22
26
30
34
Harmonics
38
Normal
Harmonics
42
Normal
46

CHRIS WOODS CONTEMPORARY ACOUSTIC GROOVE PLAYER

SEEING SOUNDS PART 2

Chris dips his musical beak into nature with this back-to-basics series on how to get creative

This is the second column exploring composing and playing with a picture in mind. As always if you missed the previous part you can still jump right on in. In Part 1 I offered you two specific images, with matching compositions – focused on nature. This month I wanted to delve into the animal kingdom, which is brimming with character and personality, which we can bring out in our composition and playing. It creates a great opportunity for you to understand the personality of the notes and sounds you play on the guitar.

After hours of racking my brains to think of a furry or feathered friend to use as an example I stumbled across the infamous image of the hippo with a bird on his back. Now, I don't want to turn this into an Attenborogh-inspired nature piece, but turns out the creature is called an oxpecker.

So, armed with my new found naturalist knowledge, I set about writing a short piece to represent the almost graceful oxpecker and secondly, the distinctly ungraceful hippo. The chords, harmony, tempo, time signature and more, have all been chosen to bring that image to life. As always I have kept things as simple as possible to give you room to develop it into your own idea and to make reading the music accessible to all.

EXAMPLE 1 - 'THE OXPECKER'

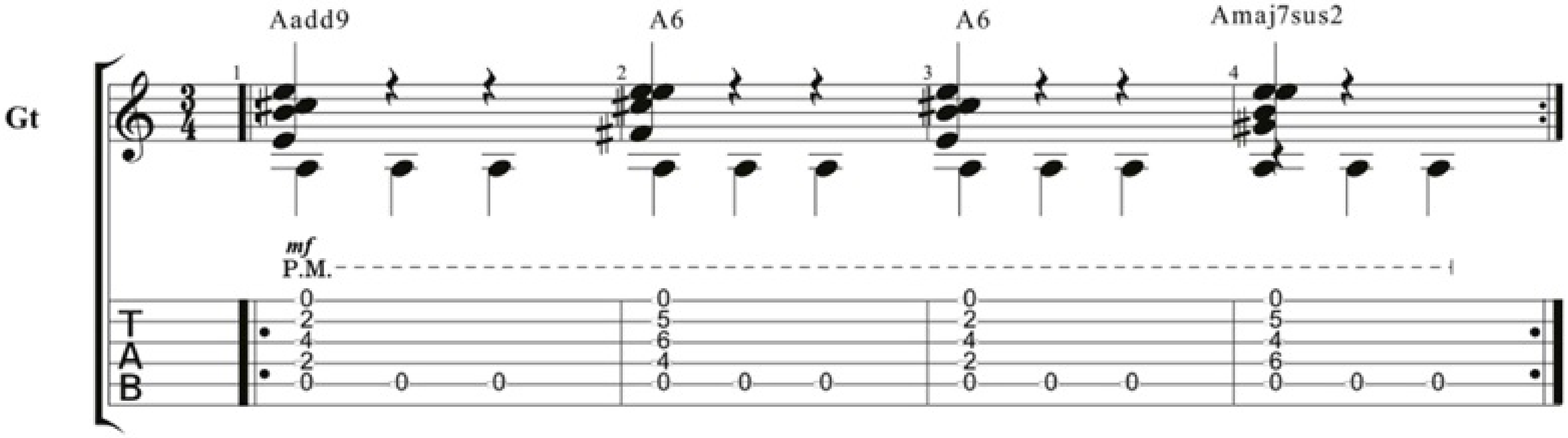
I have chosen the key of A major. It's a comfortable and, in this case, positive key. The time signature is 3/4 which gives us a graceful waltz feel. We begin with a cycle of three chords, which are closely related. Play the pedalled open A with a palm mute and let the chords ring out: this creates a sense of movement or flight, but the treble part of the chord rings out with a positive sparkle. We then pick through a simple arpeggio pattern with the same chords and the same simple crotchet rhythm. The final bar adds a light hearted turnaround with a fresh chord and a move to a quaver rhythm, leading us back to the start.

EXAMPLE 2 - 'THE HIPPO'

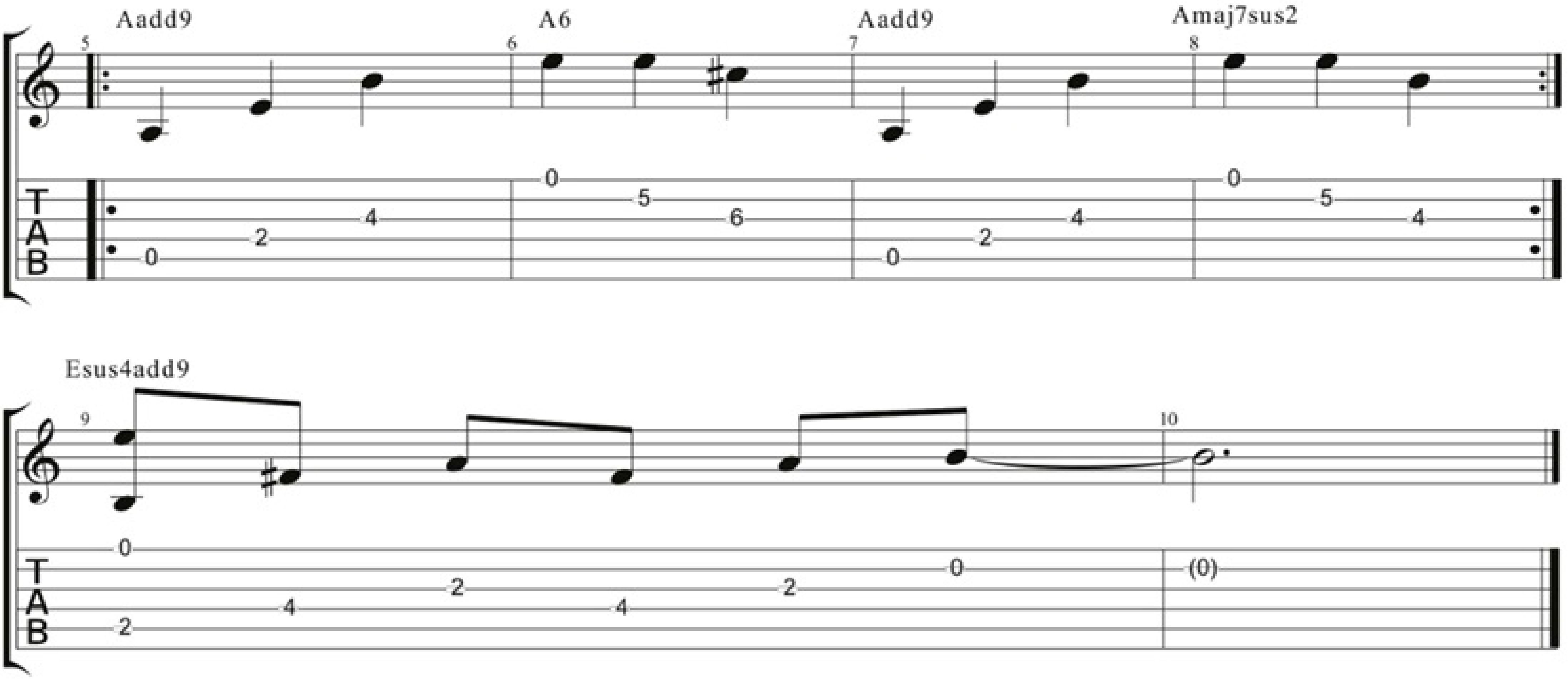
The hippo, in my mind is a borderline comedy animal, when viewed from the safety of your own home at least. So I have chosen an almost comedy style blues, with a 'plodding' 100BPM tempo in the familiar 4/4 time signature. Focused around a simple E major chord, first play a bass note of E and then strum the full chord and quickly kill the notes, with your left or right hand. This is followed by two half bends which helps to create that awkward comedy. We then slightly vary the riff and include a simple melodic movement. The final bar is another light hearted turn around to lead us back to the beginning. ■

Red-billed Oxpecker, Buphagus erythrorhynchus on Zebra' by Derek Keats, CC 2.0 license

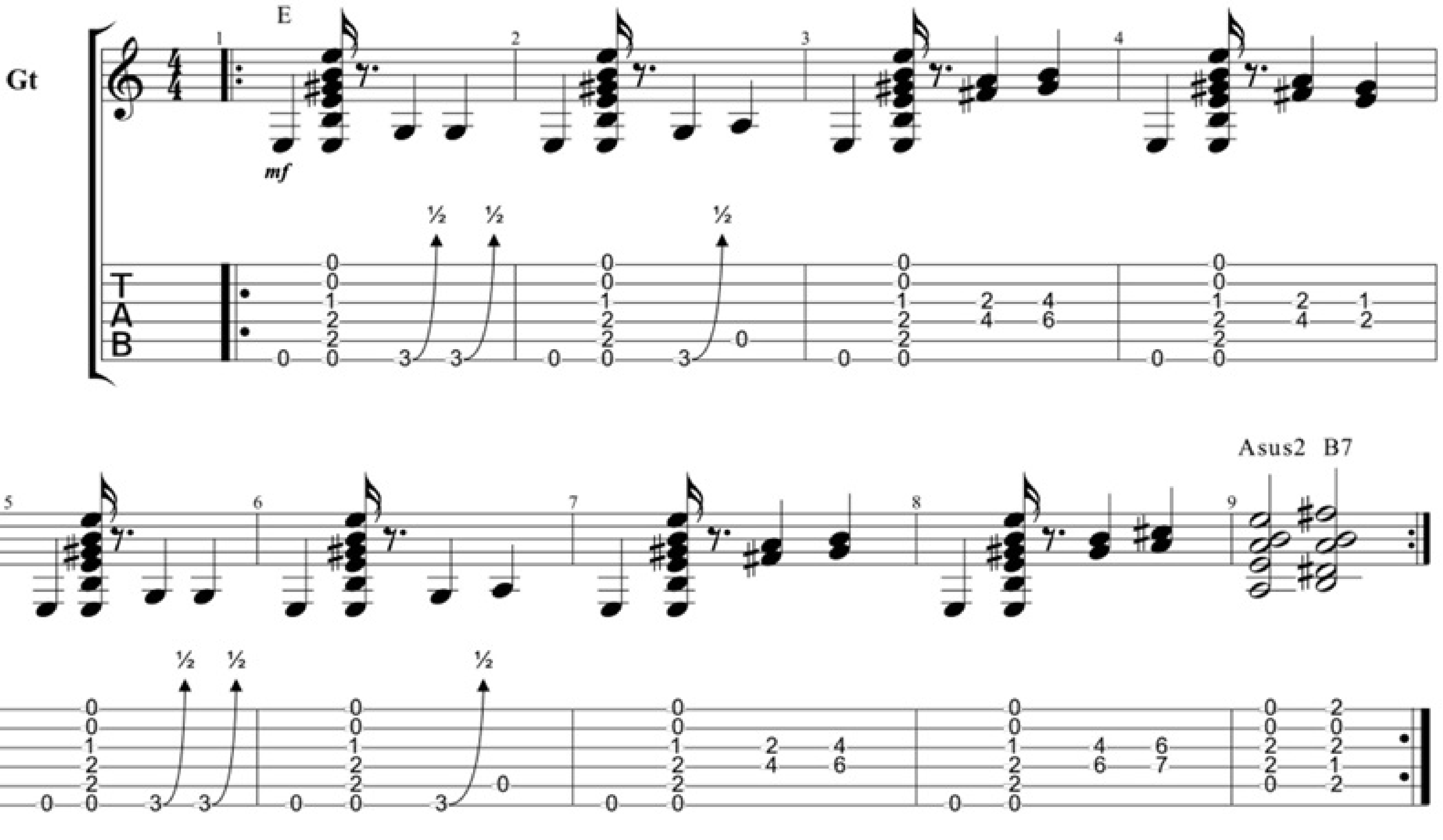
EXAMPLE 1 - 'THE OXPECKER'



"This is a great opportunity for you to understand the personality of the notes and sounds you play on the guitar"



EXAMPLE 2 - 'THE HIPPO'



ON THIS MONTH IN 1936

Little is known about Robert Johnson's life, but 81 years ago this month, the legendary bluesman recorded a body of music which would have influence far beyond his short life

Robert Johnson is among the first and most influential Delta bluesman. Eric Clapton said of Johnson's music: "After a few listenings I realised that, on some level, I had found the master, and that following his example would be my life's work."

Bob Dylan said: "When Johnson started singing, he seemed like a guy who could have sprung from the head of Zeus in full armor."

Despite recording just 29 songs before his mysterious death, aged 27, Johnson is credited with writing blues standards like 'Dust My Broom' (which Elmore James made into a postwar electric-blues anthem), 'Sweet Home Chicago', 'Ramblin' on My Mind', 'Love in Vain' and 'Stop Breaking Down' (both covered by the Rolling Stones), as well as 'Terraplane Blues' (covered by Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band).

But it is perhaps song 'Crossroad Blues' that fascinates many the most. Recorded on November 27, 1936, the song has become part of the Johnson mythology as referring to the place where he supposedly sold his soul to the Devil in exchange for his musical talents.

Although the lyrics don't contain any specific references, there was a long-standing Delta myth that talks of a bluesman who waited at a deserted country crossroads in the dark of a moonless night for Satan to come and tune his guitar. It's a story made more relevant, in the construction of the Robert Johnson myth, when coupled with Johnson's frequent references to the Devil in his songs.

While little is known about Johnson's life and career, his recordings are well documented. In October 1936, Johnson auditioned for music store owner and sometime talent scout HC Speir in Jackson, Mississippi.

Speir passed on Johnson's contact information to Ernie Oertle, who was a representative for ARC Records. After a second audition, Oertle arranged for Johnson to travel to San Antonio, Texas, for a recording session.

Johnson recorded 22 songs for ARC over three days from November 23 to 27, 1936. During the first session, he recorded his most commercially viable songs, including 'Terraplane Blues', 'Sweet Home Chicago' and 'I Believe I'll Dust My Broom'.

'Cross Road Blues' was recorded during the final San Antonio session, on Friday, November 27, 1936. The sessions continued at an improvised studio in Room 414 at the Gunter Hotel. ARC producers Art Satherley and Don Law supervised the recording and used a portable disc cutting machine. It is unknown what input, if any, they had into Johnson's selection of material to record or how to present it. Two similar takes of the song were recorded.

ARC and Vocalion Records issued the first take of 'Cross Road Blues' in May 1937 on the then standard 78rpm record. The single, with B-side 'Ramblin' on My Mind', sold poorly and was not reissued until 1990's *Robert Johnson: The Complete Recordings*. Bluesman Elmore James revived the song with recordings in 1954 and 1960–1961 and Cream popularised the song as 'Crossroads' in the late 1960s; their blues rock interpretation inspiring many cover versions and earning a place in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's *500 Songs That Shaped Rock and Roll*.

To the surprise of the record industry, the double-CD box set *The Complete Recordings* sold over half a million copies and was certified platinum. Over half a century after Johnson's death, the CD package received a Grammy for Best Historical Recording. ■

John Adams

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